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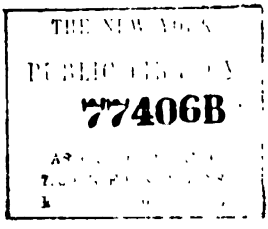

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TO
MARY

TITANS

TITANS

"I the Lord thy God am a jealous God."—*Moses.*

TITANS

CHAPTER I

SPRING! Old Earth is awaking after her long sleep. The short days are lengthening, the long nights giving way before the advancing sun. The Northern Islands are beginning to stretch themselves, as it were, like the rested sleeper who turns on his back and with a wide yawn opens his eyes glad of the new day.

On the northernmost island of the group, the remotest, the ruggedest, the beautifulest, sits the little village of Eyre. Nestling back against the low hills as though pressing away from the advancing waves in coy timorousness, huddled together like children for mutual protection and mass courage, the weather beaten cottages of the fisherfolk stand about at disordered angles. Facing every which-way, oblivious, apparently, of roadway or view, they might have been picked up by some giant child at play and put down again carelessly haphazard. And set in the midst of this heterogeneous grouping of cottages the little church, red painted with white spire

and gilded weather vane, points the ultimate goal of human endeavor.

Nearer the water's edge long poles supporting the tarred seines, odd contrivances for drying fish, for smoking meats, benches in the open for carpenter work, boxes and barrels, fishtraps, kegs, buoys, anchors, piles of rope, parts of destroyed or half-built boats, cork floats—all the innumerable paraphernalia of a fishing community lie about on every hand, surrounding and cluttering the ways, boathouses and sheds.

Seen from the bay on a sunny spring morning it is a colorful picture. Blue and violet in the shadows, emphasized here and there by a startling blaze of orange-red in close juxtaposition with cool greens and yellows spotted against the sober grays and browns of weathered shingles and clapboards.

Among the sheds, the most imposing, but solely because of extent, rambles Malcolm's boat shop, ways and foundry. Built originally of boards and shingles like the rest, but added to and repaired with bits of salvage from here, there and otherwhere it is now reminiscent of a faded patchwork quilt or old rag carpet. Inside it is hardly less colorful, its crudities subdued to harmony by the filtered light.

At one end, the blacksmith shop, its busy forge glowing dull red on men in leather aprons;

ring of hammer blows, flying sparks, hoarse voices and low laughter. At the other, the ways sloping gently between enormous sliding doors, to the water, dancing green, blue, silver in the spring sunshine, and tossing about the ceiling and rafters a thousand points of light. Spread about the body of the huge place, dories, wherries, dinghies, piles of buoys and mooring cans, long planks of dressed lumber stacked in orderly sizes, and hung against the walls, sternboards, cabin ornaments, red and green side-light brackets, name boards, of white wood or mahogany, decorated and gold lettered

It is a place significant to the life of Eyre by its occupying the centre of it—not geographically, but humanly, like the village grocery in America or the village "pub" in England. The gathering and disseminating place for news, gossip, exchange of thought and interests; the community forum.

Malcolm himself was a middle-aged Scotchman. He was somewhat bent with heavy work but still a powerful figure of a man, and owned a face of a thousand wrinkles, mostly got by laughter suppressed to smiles. A silent man as a rule, but when he did have something to say it was delivered in an almost incomprehensible jargon mixed of Scotch and a half dozen English North Country dialects, and

spoken with a drawl which served admirably to emphasize his humor or to point his sharper speeches.

A mile or so away from the village proper, on the inner end of the western promontory, stands a single cottage, as though too modest —or too arrogant—to push itself among the grouped homes of the other inhabitants of Eyre. It is a wind-swept home, protected only from the north by the cliffs against which it seems to lean, but in every other direction bravely facing the open sea.

Some years ago, before the World went mad, before Post Impressionists, Cubists, Futurists, before New Schools in music, and the advent of Free Verse, this brave little cottage was the home of Helmon Strong and his wife, Elspeth. And it was of Helmon Strong that a group of fishermen, seated or standing about Malcolm's boat shop, were talking on this day in April.

" 'Twas his own fault."

"So it is yours ye have but one hand, Garret, but that makes it no pleasanter for ye."

"Ay," Garret retorted angrily, " 'twas my fault that I did two men's work aboard yer boat for th' pay of one, Captain Harrod!"

Garret had lost his hand when the jib sheet, whipping in a gale, made a hitch about his wrist, and with a jerk almost tore his hand from his

arm. Harrod had called him a blundering fool, paid his "sick bill," and dismissed him.

Malcolm looked up from his brace and winked at Garret. "A mon's as Gud mecht 'im," he said, and no one contradicting this truism, added, "Till he gi's 'esel' airs an' grazzes, an' thenkst to jodge un's fellaz."

"Ay, an' ye'll never see Helmon judgin' his fellers. What he makes in ill luck, he'll pay in kindness to somebody."

"Should ha' been a parson, should Helmon. Never cut for a fisherman."

"Ye're right there. Th' loss of th' *Elspeth* 'll put 'im back a life's work, I'm thinkin'. Seed 'em goin' into old Hornfiist's this mornin'."

There was a composite grunt of sympathy, and then Malcolm muttered, "Gudd 'elp un! 'E'll squeeze un's marrer outen un's bunz afore 'e's done wi' 'im."

"He'll be coming roun' for berth soon."

"I'll not give 'im berth this season," Captain Harrod said emphatically. "His luck'll follow 'im, ye may be sure."

There was general assent to this notion from the several masters present.

"Ay, ye'd leave him to shift, ye would," Garret said. "Ye'd leave any man to starve if ye'd not see a profit in 'im."

"There's no man in th' Islands I'd take on,

that can't look after himself," Harrod replied, without heat. "I'll have no lack-wits on th' *Flyin' Dutchman.*"

"Ye'll no be callin' Helmon Strong a lack-wit, Stork Harrod, not in this shop, ye'll not," Malcolm drawled.

"Here nor elsewhere," Harrod agreed, "I was speakin' of Garret, that's paid th' same wage by Tom Rorth, paid to men wi' two good hands, an' grumbles he's not paid double."

"Ay, Helmon's Christ's man, as Parson's said many a time. He'll find reward in th' next world—likely."

"He thinks his son John reward enough for this one. I've hearn him say as much."

"God prosper th' lad. He's a better seaman than's father. Here's Parson comin', boys. Cease swearin'."

A general laugh greeted this time worn jest, and was followed by a silence until Parson entered the boat shop. He was a man in early middle age, stockily built, with large head and tremendous shoulders, long arms and slightly bowed legs. His eyes were gray and kind under shaggy brows, his hair bushy and like his beard coarse. He preached the Jehovah—a God of jealous vengeance who punished with a lavish rod—and believed in the doctrine of Rewards and Punishments, in the literal truth of every

word in the Bible with the curious exception of the second chapter of Genesis, which inconsistently enough he tried to square with more modern theories of the Origin of Man.

He was greeted with a familiar respect tinged with irony—the irony of men who know themselves inferior but wish to preserve to themselves the impression of superiority. He stood near the door, his hands behind him, his feet apart, more like an habitual horseman than a man of the cloth.

"Who's takin' on Helmon th' season, my boys?" he asked in a rasping bass, indicative of a deep chest.

No one answered. But Parson evidently expected silence, for he looked the masters over, his brows drawing together in a frown of thought.

"You had him last season, eh, Norton?"

"Ay," Norton said shortly, nodding his head in a satisfied manner.

"F' th' first catch, Norton, m' lad," Captain Swinton corrected.

"Wull,' 't was he left me, wa'n't it?" Norton replied. "I kep' 'im on till he got 'is own boat. No more could I do, I'm thinkin'."

"Let you finish out last season this one, then," Harrod suggested.

"An' what's the matter of you takin' 'im on

this time, Cap'm Stork?" Norton asked irritably.

"Ye heard his reasons a minute ago, didn't ye?" Garret put in, grinning broadly and winking an eye at Parson.

"What was they?" Parson asked.

Every one laughed, except Stork Harrod, and Garret repeated Harrod's remark anent lackwits.

Parson shook his head, his eyes on the floor.

"I'm thinkin' ye're wrong, Stork," he said, "but I'll no argue the point wi' ye. It's my business this mornin' to see Helmon gets berth for the season, an' see it I will—at full wage, mind ye."

"My crew's a'ready picked," Harrod mumbled.

"Well, who's takin' on Helmon Strong, th' season?" Parson said again as though there'd been no words on the matter.

"You say, Parson," Swinton suggested.

Parson looked from one to another of the masters and then with a short laugh nodded toward Harrod.

"It'll be you this time, Stork." His tone was final.

Garret laughed. "Ay," he said grimly, "you, Cap'm Stork."

Harrod lifted himself from the workbench and went to Parson.

"Look here," he began, then paused. Garret laughed again, as did several of the others. Harrod raised his shoulders in a gesture of surrender. "On your head be it, Parson," he said sulkily. "My Kate have put ye onto me, I'm thinkin'. She was talkin' at me th' whole night long."

Parson joined in the laugh which Harrod's tone inspired.

"Ye're thinkin' wrong, man," he said. "But why didn't ye give in first as last? Ye should be ashamed to keep yer wife awake for such a purpose."

Harrod grimaced. "Very well, sir, but I'll ask ye to remember I've said I'd take on Helmon if his son John goes wi' me, too."

Parson put his hand on Harrod's arm.

"Don't bargain wi' yer heart, man. What think ye Helmon would say if you it was in need, an' he the master of the *Flyin' Dutchman?*"

"Right," Malcolm said, and was echoed by a half dozen low voices.

Parson took a folded clipping, from an old newspaper, from his coat pocket.

"Boys," he said gently. "I'm goin' to read ye something I've carried wi' me for many many years. Now, listen. It's a piece written for the newspaper after an old friend of my

youth was taken to his last reward. He was a parson, like me, only different—listen.

" 'Now that it is too late to gladden his dear old heart with a cordial handshake and a word of genuine appreciation, some of us are realizing that a saintly soul has gone out from among us. The last hymn that he selected was sung at his funeral yesterday, and through a mist of tears many of us felt that more might have been done to cheer the closing days of this faithful servant of God. Let us all take the lesson to heart and allow no day to pass without making a definite effort to render life brighter and sweeter to some soul living near us——' " Parson broke off and looked about at the silent men. "Some soul living near us," he repeated, then began to read again.

" 'The loving words we might say would thrill the hearts that are hungry to hear them; the pressure of the hand in sympathy; the letter we should have written but neglected from day to day until too late; the tired child to be comforted; the wayward one to be tenderly advised; these are the things that make life worth living. These are the things of real value that cannot be measured, that refresh and strengthen our hearts as well as others and leave no sting behind them.' "

There was silence for a while after Parson

finished reading while he folded the clipping and put it back in his pocket. Then—"I'll take him off ye, Cap'm Stork," came from one of the masters. And "So'll I," from several.

"Ye'll not," Harrod growled and followed Parson out of the boat house.

"Yonder's a man," Garret said, with a jerk of his head toward Parson's retreating back.

"Ay, should change jobs wi' Helmon, I'm sayin'."

"Not in this island. Parson works harder nor any man in the place, 'less I'm mistaken."

"Works harder an' does more."

"Helmon's no good for this world. Likely John'll mend their luck for 'em. If not, God help 'em."

When Parson undertook a thing he left "naught to chance," as he phrased it. He meant now that Captain Harrod should engage Helmon Strong's services for nothing less than the entire season, and this the fisherman understood. They walked a while in silence, till in sight of Harrod's home, where Kate was putting out the wash. Then Harrod grunted.

"I'll not be givin' ye away, man," Parson laughed. "Go an' tell her she's right, an' ye was only teasin'."

Harrod grunted again, spat and shook his head.

"She's knowin' me better'n that, Parson, an' more, she's knowin' you better."

Parson laughed again and leaned on the gate as he called to Mrs. Harrod.

"Stork's takin' yer advice, Kate, after all. Ye'll keep the pot on th' fire a matter of ten minutes or so? I'll send him back by that."

Kate Harrod looked round over her shoulder and smiled understandingly.

"Ay, Parson, or ten hours. But ye'll be doin' Stork no service to send him home till th' contract's made. He'll eat nothin' in this house till he's——"

She broke off at an emphatic gesture from her husband, and looking in the direction his thumb pointed saw Helmon Strong coming down the lane toward them.

Parson whispered to Harrod, and the Captain started up the lane to meet Helmon. A man somewhat past middle age, stocky, but not powerful looking like Parson. His hair was thin, of a yellowish white and a little longer than tidiness would have had it. A scraggy beard and drooping moustache of the same unkempt look as his hair disguised his face—disguised, because on a closer inspection his face showed almost beautiful. Light blue eyes set high under

the brows, a straight nose with finely moulded nostrils and a mouth like a girl's. But an expression of gentleness, of sweetness almost comic in its exceeding contrast to the expected. The face of a poet, but lacking guile; of a saint, but lacking madness; of a child, but lacking ignorance. For, though inefficient, Helmon Strong was far from incompetent. He knew a great deal about the business of fishing, more than many a successful master, but seemed unable to use his knowledge to his own advancement. He was a dreamer, not a doer—a dreamer, not of "great deeds, strong men, hearts hot, thoughts mighty," but of "slow moving hours that languidly drop as o'er-ripened fruit from sallow trees," as one great poet has said of such dreamers.

He was a good man, as all who knew him acknowledged, but separated from his goodness he stood far from the highest respect of the community. No one there called him shiftless, for that word implies a something that none would have cared to attach to Helmon. He was loved as no other man in the village was loved, with a deeper affection, indeed, than Parson. But it's doubtful if this was fully understood by his neighbors. They were not given to analyzing their feelings nor, in fact, thinking of such things as comparative attitudes. A consensus

of opinion if come at at all would have shown a tendency to attribute Helmon's lack of material welfare to something variously designated, but in the end best expressed by the vague word Luck. He was essentially of those whose luck fails at every crisis. Over and over again he had found himself at the very edge of success in some venture, when, oblivious to the obvious, he would let slip the vital occasion of his effort. After years of saving, saving which might better be called pinching, he had at last acquired a boat of his own, only to lose her when the first gale of winter struck the islands but a few weeks before it was expected.

It was this misfortune, which had occurred the previous autumn, that had caused the vortex of discussion in Malcolm's boat shop that spring day. But there were circumstances and consequences involved of which even those who knew most about the man were ignorant.

Every penny Helmon and Elspeth had found it possible to scrape together by their united toil and saving, Helmon had put into this boat, and her loss left him bankrupt He was forced to borrow to keep his family from starving. Undismayed, unembittered, he put his hand once more to the plough, but staggered a little as he turned the furrows. He was getting tired. And still, as regularly, as devoutly, as reverently,

with simple faith and gratitude he continued to thank the Maker and Controller of all things for His blessings.

"Good day to ye, Helmon," Harrod said as they came up to each other. "Have ye got berth for th' season, I'm wonderin'?"

"I was on my way to Malcolm's this minute, to see what I could get," Helmon replied, with a glance beyond Harrod to Parson and Kate. "I was thinkin' maybe Norton or Clinton'd be needin' a hand."

"I'll thank ye to sign on wi' me, Helmon, if so be ye're not stuck on seiner's service?"

"I'll do it an' gladly, Stork," Helmon said eagerly, "gladly. An' I'll do my best by ye. I thank ye, Cap'm," he added as Harrod turned and with a grunt strode by his side, "ye've took a weight off my mind."

He smiled and nodded in acknowledgment of Mrs. Harrod's greeting and with the excitement of relief in his voice said to Parson: "Cap'm Harrod's takin' me on f' th' season!"

"Good," Parson said, wondering if he were suspected of meddling.

But the notion had not entered Helmon's head. He was sure now of a season of work, and for the moment had no room for any other thought. He thanked Harrod again and smiled to Kate as he walked on with Parson.

As they trudged along the sandy road side by side—the man of God and God's fool—Helmon was thinking of God's goodness to him, while Parson thought of the strangeness of His ways.

"John'll be shippin' wi' th' halibutters, I s'pose?"

"Ay," Helmon nodded, "John's a val'able hand to the cruisers. He'll be gettin' 'centage wage this season, he says."

He stopped short and taking his left hand from his pocket, swept a wide gesture toward the sea.

"Look, Parson. Look at them shadows out there by Hull Down."

Parson looked, and then to the sky. "Ay," he said, "wind clouds."

Helmon smiled and shook his head. "Cloud shadows is gray, Parson. Them's the color of violets."

Parson stared, first at the shadows, then at Helmon. "Violets?" he repeated.

Helmon laughed.

"I'm a fool of a man," he said, starting on again, "but whenever the shadows is that color, I always think they's angels' wing shadows."

Parson made no reply. He was not used to poetic fancies and took Helmon's words now as merely an expression of his gratitude for relief from anxiety.

They parted at the fork of the roads and Helmon went on more slowly up the hill to his home. At the gate he stood gazing about him. The view was one he loved, especially at "th' spring o' th' year."

From where he stood the village looked like a toy village, and he could see the white, curving beach with its dots and splashes of color. The inner bay, tranquil in the noon sunshine, like a prodigious mirror, doubled the fleet of fishing boats, the piers, mooring stakes, buoys and the dun cliffs beyond, inverted. Outside, the sea's green and silver sparkle reminded him of a great lazy fish of a million, million flashing scales. On the southwestern horizon the dark hump of Hull Down Island broke the perfect vertical of sky and sea and dwarfed a tramp steamer to the proportions of a floating chip.

Helmon stood drinking in the sustaining loveliness of the scene and vaguely wondering at himself till he realized that his name was being called.

"Helmon!"

He turned and saw his wife, Elspeth, standing in the doorway of the cottage. She was a woman not yet fifty but looking full ten years older than that. A slight body with sloping shoulders bent forward as if with the weight of her large head and masses of dark hair, showing

streaks of gray at the sides and back. She wrapped her hands in her apron and shivered.

"Th' wind's east still," she muttered. Then aloud to her husband: "Do ye want no dinner at all? We been waitin' for ye this half hour an' more."

He smiled as he went up the garden path. "It's a day for outdoors," he said, "I clean forgot 't was dinner time."

He put an arm about his wife as he came up to her and shut the door with his free hand.

"Where's John?"

"He's gone down to Malcolm's. Couldn't wait no longer, he said."

"I didn't meet him"

"Went by th' cliffs, likely. 'S shorter that way, he says."

"Ay, shorter." A look of anxiety clouded Helmon's clear eyes. "But 's dangerous climbin' them rocks. I wish——"

"Don't mind John," Elspeth interrupted, "he'll take care. What luck?"

He told her of his meeting with Harrod and Parson, and of Harrod's offer. She thought—"Parson's doin'" but she said: "God be thanked!"

"Amen," he murmured as he sat down to his meal.

Helmon Strong was a man on the hither side of forty and his wife, Elspeth, not far off it, when their first child was born to them. And this though they had been man and wife for upwards of fifteen years. Throughout those years they had earnestly prayed for a son, and when, long after hope had abandoned them, God seemed to listen and relent, they gave over asking and spent their lives in thankful praise.

The boy was named John—(Yahweh has been gracious)—after the Beloved Disciple, and was brought up in the faith of his fathers. Brought up, too, to feel his advent in this place of toil, a direct blessing vouchsafed his parents by the Creator of the universe. The compliment implied by this attitude on the part of his people, little John could not fail to appreciate. But its logic was sometimes, even in his early boyhood, difficult to his literal mind. As time went on and he grew in strength and understanding John came to adore these simple parents of his, who could be so humbly thankful for what seemed to him but the merest of nature's manifestations. He believed his father the best man in the world and his mother the gentlest, the sweetest, the kindest of women. That an all-loving God should reward them was not to be wondered at—indeed the contrary But soon enough he began to feel that their blessings were meagre compared to

their desserts, and then resentment was born in his heart.

He went about the village, to school and among the homes of his comrades, to gradually realize the puzzling phenomenon of his parents' paucity of blessings. From puzzlement he came quickly enough to a positive need for a solution of the problem. He did not voice his thoughts to his father, but to his mother he went often as the burden of this oppressive trouble weighed upon his young spirit.

"Yer father asks no more of God, John dear," she said the first time, and thought him satisfied. But when she discovered that she had given his need nothing, she went to Parson.

"I can't tell him what he wants to know, Parson, sir. He says if God is all goodness why can't He see the goodness in others an' reward accordin'? What am I to say to such talk as that?"

"Leave him to me, Elspeth," Parson said, smiling at the good woman's dilemma. "He's a good boy an' looks upon his father as upon a saint. It'll not be so hard to make him understand, I'm thinkin'."

But when Elspeth had gone Parson sat long working out the problem. It was not so easy, he discovered, to put these things clearly for youth and inexperience as at first thought it had

seemed. As simple as two and two to the good parson, but how was he to put into words—how place intelligibly before the adoring son of a man beloved by all who knew him, a phenomenon of psychology, a vague and unexpressible matter of the supreme mystery of consciousness: Personality?

But Parson did his best and with a sure faith in the outcome. For whatever his limitations Parson's was an abiding faith, and his sincerity as complete.

But, "Why?" asked the boy. And again after a full hour of patient listening—"Why?" And in the parson's unsatisfactory replies he imagined his first cause for doubt; doubt of everything he had ever been taught on this subject. His literal mind had until now taken these teachings literally. "Ask and ye shall receive" He had asked and he had not received. That did not trouble him so greatly, for he recognized his unlikeness to sainthood, but his father—he had asked and had not received. A definite promise had been made and had not been fulfilled. And upon his bewilderment John built a whole philosophy of doubt.

He fell into the habit outside his own home of demanding "How do ye know?" from all and sundry, and insisting upon a reply. His scorn for equivocation or the inability to express—the

latter a not uncommon failing among his associates—was scathing and got him many an enemy of one kind and another. A circumstance which concerned him not at all. But his attitude developed his naturally keen mind to an extraordinary degree and gave him an unwarranted self-reliance which forced his pride to support him in any endeavor no matter how mad its inception. And in a fishing community of this sort opportunities for the exercise of madly conceived adventures are not wanting.

In the races—foot, swimming, on the ice or on snow shoes, he was beaten more often than not, but only because he scorned to compete with any but his betters. This until he was about twelve years old, when he won the free-for-all swimming race, a mile and a quarter, from the landing pier out and around Gull Rock and return, in which men of twice his age and more were contestants. Then came to him for the first time, and dimly, but in gradually intensifying vividness, the realization that it was his to turn the misfortunes of the Strongs to success. And as in time the idea clarified itself in his mind he visioned an uncommon success—a success such as the Islands had never known.

For the next two or three years his life was a set teeth affair which led him into many absurd exaggerations of effort and excesses of

boasting. He had been a good loser, none better, but he was an odious winner. And as he won now, nine times in ten he was not popular. But the result of these years, for him, was that his judgment was constantly in exercise, and, as he grew into youth and began to take hold, he discovered himself far in advance of his fellows mentally as well as physically.

When he was just turned fifteen he was like a man of twenty or more; in build a giant, nearly six feet three in his bare feet, and, unlike most boys who spring up to abnormal height at so early age, broad and strong. And his mind seemed to have followed his body in growth and power.

On that spring morning when Parson took command in Malcolm's boat house and with characteristic force and energy secured for Helmon Strong a season's fishing, John marched himself down to that centre of Eyre's activities and with a force and energy not unlike the parson's offered his services for sale.

He'd gone to sea first at thirteen and had proved himself the equal of many a veteran fisherman. This was to be his third season and he was determined to work no longer for "'prentice wage" (so much per day).

Garret saw him coming along the beach and nudged Tom Rorth, the youthful captain of the *Petrel*.

"There's a fisherman," he whispered, jerking his head sidewise toward the window.

Tom looked. "Ay," he nodded, "'ll be a master soon enough if he can live down his conceit."

"Conceit?" Garret laughed. "Conceit or no, he's a val'able hand aboard a cruiser, Cap'm Tom."

"Not aboard the *Petrel*," Tom said indifferently, and walked away.

"Hm," Garret commented under his breath, "jealous, eh?" Aloud he said: "Not many lads, at that, 'll stick out they tongues at mack'rel and choose a halibutter, Cap'm Tom. You didn't."

"My dad wouldn't 'a' hearn to it if I had," Tom answered. "He knowed th' way t' make a fisherman."

"I'm thinkin' John Strong knows the way, hisself," Crawford joined in.

"Thinks he does," Tom corrected, "but that's not sayin' he does."

"A good start for it," Garret suggested, "an' he's to be had for 'prentice wage, at that."

"He'll be askin' 'centage wage, like as not this season. Been to sea all of two seasons a'ready," Tom said sarcastically. Tom had spent five years at 'prentice wage before he'd thought of asking share. He was some five or

six years John's senior, somewhat the same build and carried a good mind in his fine head. His father had died just as Tom had reached maturity and he'd found himself the master of the largest and fastest schooner in the fleet. From the heights of his seniority and position as an owner-captain he looked down upon the younger man, and unknowingly resented John's rapidly growing popularity and efficiency.

Rivalry between these two was inevitable from the fact of their likeness, and, too, that there was not another man in the Islands who could measure with either of them.

At this time their rivalry consisted only in the circumstance that Tom Rorth had what John Strong was set upon having. There was no envy in this ambition of John's. He did not want Tom Rorth's schooner, the *Petrel,* he wanted something better. As for Tom, the idea of rivalry had not yet entered his mind. He thought of John Strong as he recalled himself at that age: a mere boy who should be humble in the presence of his elders and proud of their notice, when it was vouchsafed him. But John knew no humility of the kind, nor indeed pride of the kind. He felt humble only in the presence of his parents, and that only because he loved them. As for pride, it's doubtful if he had yet come to understand its real

meaning. If he was vain—well, he was very young and very human.

He came now into the boat house with a confident swing and greeted the masters nearest the door by name.

"Cap'm Swinton, Cap'm Eldridge, Cap'm Norton."

"Lookin' fer berth?" Norton asked.

"Ay," John answered, "but not with you, sir."

"Kennedy's yer man. Eh, John?" that captain called across the boat he was at work on with Malcolm. "Th' *Sophie* 'll be sailin' inside th' week if Malcolm here's a true man, an' no loafer."

"Ay," John said, "but not at 'prentice wage, this season, Cap'm Kennedy."

There was a general laugh at this. Tom Rorth looked at Garret and shrugged, as if to say—"Didn't I tell ye?"

Kennedy stood up, pressing his knee against the steaming plank Malcolm was bending into place.

"Ye think yerself worth 'centage, then, do ye, son?"

"That or lobster bait," John answered.

"Prove it an' I'll take ye on," Kennedy said, nodding to the room generally.

"Taken," John said quietly, and with the

words became a master fisherman, for he knew, and so did Kennedy, that he would have no difficulty in equalling the catch of any man in the *Sophie's* crew.

Garret shrugged now, and muttered, "Tom's a fool to let Kennedy have him, that's a go."

John left the boat house and went on down to the piers. He stood on the stone landing-place, his foot on the crown of a bumper, and surveyed the anchored fleet. He saw himself in the cabin of one of those fine vessels, instead of in the fo'c's'le, and his heart beat faster. He'd be master of the best boat in the fleet some day, he told himself, and from that moment he began to take God's slights of his adored parents with less serious resentment.

CHAPTER II

When he parted from Helmon at the fork, Parson went on to his little cottage on the hill, and as he strode along the thawing road, careless of mud and puddles, he tried to puzzle out some of the mysteries of life. He had served his God for upwards of a quarter of a century and not till John Strong had demanded to be told "Why" had these puzzling problems of his calling weighed heavily enough in his conscientious heart to give him pause.

They were in the main a simple folk, this hardy flock of his, and took their religion simply. And he loved them—every one. Too much, he sometimes thought, for their own good. He thought of them as his children, and—with a wry smile—as not a little spoiled.

He had intended himself for a missionary and had taken an M.D. degree to fit himself for the needs of remote life. But coming to Eyre to relieve his predecessor temporarily, the little village had so wound itself about his heart that, when the old parson had died, he found it impossible to tear himself away. So he had stayed on, telling himself he would some day go—knowing all the while that he would never go.

At the cottage he found the usual number of spiritual and medical patients, and soon enough forgot his puzzles in ministering to them.

He went through the little living-room, smiling and nodding to the waiting men and women and children, on into the tiny study; a room small enough when bare, but not made larger by the bookshelves which lined the walls, four sides, and filled with tomes on theology, medicine, law, naval architecture, ornithology, botany, anthropology, zoology, ichthyology and a scattering of philosophy.

Here he knelt and prayed silently for some minutes before he rose and opening the door, said cheerily:

"First. You, Will? Come in, my boy."

Will Langan, a bridegroom of the previous September, and now a panic stricken about-to-be father, broke down and wept as a frightened child weeps, when he tried to tell his fears and concerns for his young wife, who would in all likelihood be a mother before the fleet homed in from the first voyage of the season.

But the young fisherman went away ashamed of his cowardice and heartened for the fearful separation.

Next came Mrs. Ingleside, an aged widow, bent and twisted with rheumatism. Then the Crawford twins, aged ten years, and ten years

and ten minutes or so, with symptoms of "varicella" as Parson called it, to amuse and mystify the children. And old Godfrey Heminnes, whose granddaughter was "in trouble" and had been driven from her father's house with curses, to stay until she chose to confess the name of her betrayer.

These and a dozen other problems, Parson strove, with varying success and failure, to solve for his people. And at dusk his scraggy little pony—looking more like a great unkempt dog—stood at his door to take him to Hollow Vale, a village six miles away among the hills.

Old Mrs. Carraga, Portagee Joe's mother, was "verra seek" and José had walked the six miles that morning to fetch Parson.

On the way, José trudging alongside, his hand on the little pony's neck, talked of his difficulties.

"Ah, Pass'n, Pedo (José's sheep dog) 'e's git 'e's leg broke wid da Jersey—Ah, dat cow—he's a bad cow! I gonna sell him, dat cow—an' 'e's leg, 'e's broke, an' Maggie (José's Irish wife) she's no good no more. She's do no work, but she's cry all time, all day an' all night till I's mos' crazzy, an' ma modder, she's scream all time at de kids, an' she say she see gos' an' Maggie bring dem to take her soul to hell an' all, Parson. An' I try to keel da poor Pedo wid ma gun, an' Maggie say she keel me

an' all da kids an' ma modder wid a knife if I do it——"

He broke off and shrugged expressively. Then mournfully—"Ah weesh de Almighty God He make weemun sensible lak a man. Eh, Pass'n?"

Parson smiled into his beard, and leaning forward touched the troubled farmer's hand with his own.

"Th' Lord knows His business, José," he said. "Maybe Maggie knows what she's doin', too. We'll see."

He had begun to suspect that he'd find the old woman not so near death as he'd been led to expect, and when he got down from his pony at the dilapidated farmhouse his suspicions were quickly confirmed. Maggie sat on the veranda floor with the dog's head in her lap, crooning, between huge sobs, an Irish slumber song, to the accompaniment of the poor animal's whimpers of pain. Mrs. Carraga's shrill voice could be heard from inside energetically calling—in Portugese—upon God and all the saints to destroy the Irish nation, root and branch, with particular attention to its exiles. It was José who, with a sheepish grin, translated and then confessed that it was the dog for whom he had walked twelve miles over half-frozen roads. And Parson shrewdly wondered if the old woman would not have been left to die if she had indeed been

the one in need of his medical assistance? He said nothing, however, but examined the dog's leg, while Maggie held the suffering beast's snapping jaws in her bare hands and begged "docther" to forgive the deception.

"It's all my fault, sir. José'd have shot th' puoor beasty if I hadn't 'a' kep' him frum it, an' 'twas two whole days I was at him to git him to go for ye, docther. But ye know what men is, whin th' is somethin' to be done! Not you I don't mane, docther, but them like Joe an' the others. Ye'd think th' Almighty'd 've put some since in th' skulls of thim, whils' He was about it, seein' He took all th' throuble to make thim, at all, wouldn't ye, now docther?"

"Maybe He left it to the women to finish the job for Him, Maggie. What do ye think?"

"Arra!" she cried, "He'd nivver done anythin' so crewel to us puoor females as that, sir! Sure it'll take th' divil himself to break through th' skull of that Joe sometimes—Hush, Peedo—good doggie—ah, chew me hand as much as ye loike, there now, th' gintleman'll not be hurtin' ye if ye'll only kape still for a bit till he's done wit' ye."

When Parson had the dog's badly swollen leg in the splints and well wound with vari-colored bandages—a calico apron of Maggie's torn into

strips—he straightened up with a grunt of satisfaction.

"Will he be gittin' well, now docther?" Maggie asked anxiously.

"Not here," Parson said, "you'll have to send him to me, José. Tell Steve Harvey I said to fetch him over in his cart in the morning. That leg's too badly swelled. Ye should have come the day it happened——"

"Ah, the block-head! Docther, didn't I tell him a hunder' times an' more!" Maggie wailed.

José shrugged. "Meester Harvey, 'e no do dat for me, Pass'n."

"Tell him I said so, José. Good-night, Maggie. You mustn't keep José awake. He needs his sleep, an' so do you."

He went inside and spoke to the mother of José, listened to her anathemas and maledictions on poor Maggie's conduct in neglecting her husband and children for a miserable animal, gave her a sedative and a scolding and a consoling pat on the shoulder.

When he got back to his house after midnight and sat down to a hot supper of bacon and bread and butter and tea, which Mrs. Wakely, who "took care of him," had ready, waiting, he sighed happily, while listening to the woman's monologue of village news, gossip and comment.

At the end of that season John Strong's position in the Islands was an assured one. He'd won his spurs, as it were, for there was not a man in the *Sophie's* crew but had told with pride, if with a certain vulgar humor and exaggeration, of John Strong's "doin's" aboard the *Sophie*. Nor was there longer a master in the fleet, with the possible exception of Tom Rorth, who would not have gladly given him berth. And though there still came times when he felt keenly the position his father held in the community, inevitably he resented it less as his own fortunes increased and he began to realize his power to command them. He was quite willing now to share with his father's God the credit for all the blessings which seemed to flow at his touch, like water from the rock at touch of Moses' rod.

None grudged him his good fortune, it but seemed his due, and without exception—even of Tom Rorth—the masters thanked him in their hearts for taking upon his young shoulders the burden of his father's "ill luck."

John took his progress and popularity pretty much for granted. He ceased altogether to boast —everyone seemed anxious to do that for him —and with prosperity there came to him a certain poise. The predestined leader was beginning to show. But whenever he heard his

parents fervently giving thanks and praise for these blessings to the God who had so long held them back, he could not refrain from calling to mind that, had it not been for his young rage and resentment against this all powerful Being, they might very well still be without.

As he fought for his ambitions, John lost all doubts of his power to get what he fought for, and with confidence came added indulgence for this God whom everyone insisted was the giver of all things, even life and death, who was all goodness—all love. To please his father, he took to going to church once more, and his responses and amens sounded throughout the little edifice.

This was in his sixteenth year, his father was getting on toward threescore, and his mother nearing her half century. John looked forward to making for them an old age which would in some measure repay the hardships and disappointments of their long lives. And then the "thing" happened. . . .

Elspeth had, strangely enough, promise of another child, and her husband and son moved about the house as though it were the abode of angels. John was no less excited than his father. He looked forward to a sister or brother with the anticipation of a soul starved for companionship. The love his parents lavished upon him was to his temperament a remote, almost

a strange thing, and he found it difficult to respond in kind, but took it much as he took everything else that came to him—his by right. Companionship he had none. In appreciation and the essential grasp of life his mind was as far above his environment as his body and strength of purpose in advance of his years. But this advantage served only to hold him aloof from association with the boys of his own age while his youth barred him from the interests of older men. This threw him back upon himself and left him lonely. The prospect of a brother or sister therefore brought him a thrill of excitement out of all proportion to the circumstance.

When seven months had elapsed and Elspeth was beginning to need more and more the help of a hand under her arm, the fishing fleet made ready for the first take out of the new season. Helmon took John aside.

"We can't both go, son," he said.

"I've got no notion of goin'," John replied, looking off to sea.

"Maybe 't would be best for me to stay behind, John," his father said, "I'm no so good at th' grounds as you."

"I've no notion of goin'," John repeated, and tried desperately to think of a tactful reason to give, but equivocation was impossible to him,

so he only twisted on his feet and scanned the horizon.

"One has got to go, son," Helmon said after a pause. "We'll be needin' the money this summer. We can't both of us go, an' we can't both of us bide."

John turned toward the house and shook his head. "I'm not leavin' mother till she's out of danger an' all well again. She's needin' my strong arms a'ready, an' more every day that passes."

Helmon was troubled. He knew that his son did not trust him where efficiency was involved, neither did he trust himself. But in this matter he would be called upon to play only a passive part, so far as efficiency was concerned, and he felt, indeed, more capable than he believed John to be in the realm of words—words of spiritual comfort for the mother. But he had no words for argument, persuasion, and insistence was unthinkable to him.

He took his difficulty to Parson who laughed heartily and sought John to put him right.

"I've no notion of goin', Parson, sir," John said finally.

"But, my son, who do ye think you are that you must decide a thing like this?" Parson asked impatiently.

But John only shook his head and made no reply.

"Maybe he's right," Helmon said, when Parson, with some show of anger, told him of his failure to shake the boy's determination.

The fleet sailed inside the week, and three days later the *Flying Dutchman,* on which Helmon had shipped, put back, and Parson, who was lying ill with influenza, was notified of Helmon's loss in a squall which struck the fleet on their way to the Banks.

"Lord, Lord, Thou chastiseth me!" Parson cried as he threw the bedclothes aside and struggled to his feet, his sturdy, muscular legs showing beneath the shrunk and patched night shirt.

"Now, now, Parson," Captain Harrod said, "ye must stay abed. We thought only to get ye to tell us how to break it to Mrs. Strong. But they's no use you goin' out in th' wet night——"

But Parson was pulling on his clothes as fast as he could find them, and waved a hand to silence the protest.

"Harrod," he said, "this be no case of breakin' bad news. Ye know Elspeth's condition, and—and—John——" he broke off as Mrs. Wakely came into the room, and turned to her. "Mrs. Wakely, Helmon Strong is—drowned. Make up a bundle. You and I'll be stayin' at

the headland these next few days, I'm thinkin'."

Captain Harrod and his mate, Jake Harvey, protested, but to no purpose, and Mrs. Wakely knew the Parson too well to waste breath, but went out at once to obey his order.

"Ye'll come to yer death wi' yer obstinacy, man. I an' Jake's good enough to take orders, bain't we?"

"I'll come to my death when God wills, Stork Harrod," Parson said, "an' not one minute before. But them as is to hear this news . . ." his face clouded, "will be needin' more than comfortin' words before this night's past, I'm thinkin'."

He bundled himself up—for Parson was not a reckless man, and well knew the danger lurking in the damp cold of the April night—then with the two fishermen at either elbow, Mrs. Wakely trudging behind, staggered up to the cottage on the headland. On the way he got the story of Helmon's death from the men at his sides.

"Th' squall struck us just after we made the lightship. I saw it comin' an' ordered topsails in. Helmon—maybe he didn't hear right—anyhow he grabs the staysail halyards an'—I dunno—somehow he lets 'em get loose from him." Harrod paused, and Jake Harvey took up the tale.

" 'Thout waitin' for orders Helmon starts to

go aloft up the lee shrouds—the *lee* shrouds! —in a blow——"

"God A'mighty knows, maybe, what he expected to do up there with them slattin' ropes, I don't!" Harrod said. "Anyhow, when he hears me yellin' to him to come down, 'stead of takin' his time on the ratlin's he slides—just as the squall hits us, mind. Seems 's if must 'a' been meant that way—anyhow over we went till them lee dead eyes was cuttin' through three feet of water. Helmon's feet was knocked from under him and his hands tore loose like they was baby's hands, an' I saw him swep' under the counter 'fore I or Jake, here, had time to yell at him."

"Lord! Lord!" Parson muttered, shaking his head wearily.

"We got out th' boats quick as we could, but Helmon never rose once, I'm thinkin'."

"Not once," Harvey corroborated. "Not with them boots of hisn without no straps to they tops. Sh'd think not. Can't make out how a man as has been to sea from a boy couldn't learn himself more than Helmon Strong learned himself in all them years!"

"A good man," Harrod said, "but a lubber for all that. Twoscore year he's been in fishin' craft an' he never learned to board in a sea, let

alone most things the lads about the landin' knows by guess."

"God's ways 're past findin'," Parson said, "but I'm thinkin' His purpose wi' Helmon Strong was different than for the rest of us. Never have I seen a man wi' such sweetness of soul——" His voice broke on the words and great tears dropped into his grizzled beard. "Jake," he murmured, "gi' me a hand under my arm—there. These big legs of muscle be as weak as reeds. An' I'll ask ye to stay by or send somebody as strong, for I'll be needin' a hand this night for th' heavy work."

"Ay, that I will, Parson," Harrod replied, "Jake an' me, we'll take it watch an' watch. But ye forget the boy's there, sir. A strappin' big lad's John Strong."

"Stork Harrod, ye're no thinkin' what ye're sayin'. Th' boy'll be no manner o' use this night. He's more like to do harm than good. That's partly why I'd have you an' Jake by me. I'm as weak as a cat, an' I'll be needin' a hand to my arm, myself."

Outside the house they stood for some minutes while Parson prayed for the widow and son, who all unconscious of the thrust which Destiny was about to plunge deep into the innermost sanctuary of their simple lives, rested safe and

happy beyond that closed door. And, too, for himself the good man prayed; for strength to bear the weight of responsibility which this stroke of Destiny's had unwarningly placed upon him. Nor was it the first time Parson had prayed for strength to bear another's burdens. But the peculiar circumstances in this instance put him to a greater trial than his years of service had yet been called upon to bear. He was desperately aware of the potential danger —pathological and spiritual—his news contained, and his deep heart bled with pity.

With an effort he turned and facing the cottage raised his hand and knocked. In a moment the door opened and John Strong stood looking out upon the silent group. Without speaking he stepped aside and the men, supporting their Parson, and followed by Mrs. Wakely, shuffled into the room.

A low cry came from Elspeth, crouched near the chimney where she had been engaged in stirring the contents of an iron pot, hung on a crane over the slow fire of driftwood. She staggered to her feet as John put his arm about her and whispered: "Steady, mother."

No word was spoken as for the space of a long breath Parson stood with bowed head. Then, raising head and hands, he cried in vibrating

tones: "The Lord gave—the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

Elspeth's babe was born that night; a boy. And not till it was safe and the stricken woman hopefully out of danger did Parson take thought for his own illness. By that time, a matter of several days, he was at death's door, and it was Elspeth herself who in the end nursed him back to life.

On that night while his mother hung between life and death, and with the realization of his first grief scorching his ego, John Strong strode the headland rocks till dawn, and fought with God. He was but a child, hardly past his sixteenth birthday, and it had not yet come to him to deny this Being who with one dread blow had "taken away," and now held the fearful threat of another loss over his anguished heart. He pictured God as a stern chastiser and the epitome of vindictive injustice, and throughout those hours of more than darkness wrestled with Him in that conviction.

In the half Biblical language of Parson's prayers, the boy cried his defiance and his pleadings; placing upon God the responsibility for all the evil and pain of life, and the *onus probandi* of His goodness and mercy, which in measured terms of scorn he boldly denied. When with the breaking dawn came a message from

Parson that his brother was safely arrived and his mother probably out of immediate danger, John felt a sudden grim satisfaction in victory. But not for an instant did he bend to the thought of gratitude. He had fought and won! And with this idea swelling within him he went back to the cottage and took up his life where last night's news had found it.

No one had the courage to tell him how his father had come to his death, nor did he enquire. Very likely he sensed the cause of this last defeat for the man he loved, as but one more in the series which had held that gentle spirit still while the world, unconcerned, went by. What mattered details, after all? He had learned one thing from this final coup of circumstance: This ubiquitous God of his father's was a strange creature indeed! Undiscriminating if not positively vindictive, He gave and took away at will. He showered His good gifts upon the just and the unjust alike. He sent woe and agony into the homes and hearts of those who worshipped Him. And yet in spite of His omnipotence, in spite of His destroying wrath and jealousy, He could be fought and conquered if one had but simple courage and determination. Very well! John Strong would have naught to do with Him. Let God go His ways and John Strong would go his.

For his mother's sake he kept these ideas and determinations to himself, and when Parson talked of God's ways which were "past finding out" he listened silently and made no comment.

CHAPTER III

In the most imposing house in the village, a house with columns and a fence, a flagpole, a sun-dial, and a garden, lived "old Hornfist" —Captain Horner Nyte. A grim old man, who had, in his time, been of the proudest. He had married late a young and lovely girl who had borne him a daughter at the cost of her own life. Captain Nyte had expected a son, and the disappointment of a daughter and the loss of his young wife had turned the milk of human kindness sour in his breast. The embittered man had taken to money getting for solace, and from the most respected had sunk to the most despised of Eyre. Nor had money getting mitigated his resentment against the chance which had struck him down. These hardy folk of Eyre borrowed only under the direst necessity, and invariably resented the necessity to such degree that all connected with it suffered the fullness of their illogic. Thus, unjustly despised, the old man's blood turned to vitriol and he gave back hate for hate with interest compounded, and became flint and cunning in his rare deals.

His schooner, the *Dolphin,* had gone the way of her owner. From the pride of the fleet she was now hardly fit to take the water, and each succeeding season found her increasingly difficult to man. His house, too, was beginning to show the effects of neglect and parsimony. The flagpole was bare of halyards, the fence of paint, and the garden of all but weeds.

No telling what might have been the end had not the cause of the man's bitter decay blossomed, and in spite of the handicap of reminder she unconsciously bore objectively, envined herself about her father's heart, rooting her love within the very shrine where dwelt those torturing memories of her mother's dearness. But this saving grace did not begin before the girl Judith was in her tenth year, nor was it manifest even to the man himself for some years more. Thus when John Strong came to him after Helmon Strong's death, and asked an extension of the mortgage on his mother's cottage and a moratorium for the interest, Captain Nyte treated the boy with contempt, flatly refused, and threatened foreclosure. Though, when John Strong failed to come forward with the money, Captain Nyte did not carry out his threat. Whether this was due to Judith's beginning influence upon his heart's change, or to fear of the young giant's blazing eyes, opinions differed.

But as if to defy this single weakness, the old man ground his other debtors with an ever increasing pressure, until the ferment of hate he created about him was on the point of destroying him. Then occurred a thing so singular to the life of Eyre that the little village will tell of it to the end of its youngest inhabitants, as one of the mysteries of existence which point the incalculable vagaries of life . . . John Strong bearded the lion in his den and drew his teeth and claws!

A very real sympathy for the boy, his neighbors found impossible to put into words they expressed in deeds. John Strong was given every opportunity to advance his welfare and he missed not one. He knew he was being favored and he made obligation impossible by the simple expedient of returning all favors with such an extraordinary amount and quality of work that the balance was on his side more often than not.

His pride was bitter and his courage desperate. All that which his God had denied to Helmon Strong, his son determined to wring from life—"rewards and punishments" notwithstanding. He asked no favors; he wanted no help; he was sufficient unto himself. And what he could not get by the sheer strength of his body and mind he would do without. But

on this score he had no doubts. He set himself now to win the best the world had to give.

His fortunes took the very opposite turns to those his father's were used to take. His luck was phenomenal. Whatever he undertook turned out successfully, even when, as was not infrequently the case, his own ability was not called upon. A hundred times he missed disaster by the breadth of a hair. His ability was prodigious. He seemed to know his way about in the dark, in fog, to know by instinct what many others seemed unable to learn with any amount of experience. It was like a gift, his knowledge of the sea, of weather, of fish habits and the hundred and one vagaries of tides and winds and currents.

This gift—if gift it was—he used with ruthless determination for his advancement, and the result of his boldness and efficiency was not long delayed for him. Even before he looked for it, he was in position to pick and choose. And what he chose was a partnership in the best vessel—barring Tom Rorth's schooner—in the fleet.

It is significant of the young man's confidence in his ability to swing the world to his desires that this vessel was none other than old Hornfist's schooner, the *Dolphin*.

On a bright morning in February, the first

day for many months that showed promise of resurrection, John Strong walked in upon his enemy, and with the manner of a born leader of men, said: "Cap'm Nyte, the *Dolphin's* not been in commission these three seasons past. I'm proposin' you put her in commission this comin' season an' give her to me to handle," and without waiting invitation he sat down opposite the scowling old man.

Captain Nyte laughed harshly and in a tone of contemptuous sarcasm, asked: "An' where's yer payment for charter, young upstart?"

"Myself," John answered promptly. "Th' schooner's an expense to ye as she is. I'm proposin' to make her pay."

The old man stared at the young.

"Pay?" he cried, incredulous, "Pay who, young impidence? You—you comes to me—me as you owes money to, an' asks me to give you my boat? Am I hearin' ye talk, or am I clean outen my wits?"

"I want only a half interest in the smack," John said, as though he were making a concession to age's prejudice. "Let me take her out the season comin', an' if she don't pay her way twice over, I'll ask no more of you. But I'm proposin' to make her pay."

Captain Nyte's bushy eyebrows met together

against the bridge of his high nose He rose and pointed the door.

"Git outen my house, John Strong," he said evenly, "an' next time ye have the impidence to darken it, let it be with yer hand holdin' the money that's mine."

But John made no movement to go. Instead, he said:

"I can't pay what I haven't got, Cap'm, no more could you. I'm proposin' to make you well off. Give heed to my words and let be your anger till I've finished my say, sir."

Perhaps it was the "sir"—perhaps the old captain had a vision of rehabilitated fortune and respect, who knows? At any rate his next words were mild enough.

"How old be ye, John Strong?"

"Eighteen years last December, Cap'm, an' older than many men twice my years," the young man answered confidently.

Captain Nyte ignored the boast. Pointing to the door again, he said:

"An' you think you be talkin' sense, askin' a man as is old enough to be yer grandfather, besides you owin' him money an' you in yer home—you an' yer mother and brother—by his good nature only, to take ye into full partnership? Come, come, if ye've nothin' better to say don't waste my time. Go along wi' yer!"

"I'll make ye a proposition, Cap'm, an' if ye don't think I can make good my boast, try me."

"It'll do ye no good, boy, I'm not for takin' nobody into equal partnership without they has a stiff bit to offer."

"That's what I have to offer, Captain Nyte. An' that's what I'm askin' ye to give ear to," John said with a touch of impatience.

"Aye, ye have an offer of money then?" The old man's eyes glittered, and he sat down again.

"Aye, money if ye like. But not money down. Here's my word. I'll take the *Dolphin* out the comin' season an' ask no more than my proper wages so long as she does no better than she done her last season. But when she has doubled on ye—doubled, mind—I'll ask for more. Now, when she pays ye more from a half interest than ever she paid ye with a whole interest, I'll ask ye for a full partnership."

Confidence begets confidence. Old Hornfist saw with youth's eyes.

"The *Dolphin* 'll need overhaulin' before she's fit to take the water, my boy. It'll take a bit o' money to set her right. What say ye to takin' yer share of the expense of outfittin'?"

"I've made my offer to ye, Captain Nyte, take it or leave it, as it pleases yer. I want no more than I can earn."

John stood up and put on his cap. Captain Nyte looked him over.

"So be it, John Strong," he said. "Ye're not much like yer father, I'm thinkin'. Maybe ye've more ability. We'll see. I'll take ye on, at that, but ye'll have to take the *Dolphin* out as she is. I'll not put a penny of money to her till ye've showed yer power to do what ye boast so confident. Do ye take me?"

The two shook hands on the bargain, there was no "writin'" in the matter, and John Strong at eighteen became master of the best schooner in the fleet—barring only Tom Rorth's schooner, the *Petrel*.

When John walked in on Captain Nyte there had stood behind the old man's chair his daughter Judith. At this time the girl was, like John, almost abnormally tall for her age and as advanced mentally as physically. Indeed, she was like a woman grown though counting but twelve years of life.

Deep, luminous eyes under straight brows, an abundance of dark waving hair which knew no restraint but was always in her face and tumbling about her shoulders, driving her constantly to toss her head in order to free her sight, and a laughing mouth forever twitching at the corners as though unable to suppress its humor of the world, were perhaps the most

striking points in her make-up at that time. Still a child, she had the awkward airs of a child, but, too, she bore the indescribably arresting attributes of any fine animal, and male eyes were already beginning covertly to follow her as she went about the village, among the boat houses and on the beach.

But Young Lyaeus never gave her his eyes during his interview with her father. Judith had of course seen him many times before this, but with a single exception at a distance only. On the occasion of that exception she was engaged in a losing battle with some ten or more of her school mates.

The incident bears recalling since it is indicative of innate qualities—qualities diverse and at the same time like—which afterward bore for these two children fruit of a significance every whit as important to their individual lives as ever that widely condemned apple our first mother is said to have so relished . . . the identical fruit, perhaps?

The village factotum, old David, as he was called, was the sole survivor of a ship wrecked on the island's coast some forty-odd years ago. At the time of his rescue he was a lad of eight or nine years of age and remembered only his given name David. It was soon discovered that he was a "simple" and no

one caring to take the little defective in nor daring to refuse him sanctuary, he found a home wherever he happened to find himself, at close of day. He had, it was said, lived in every house in the village save only the cottage on the headland. For that he had a strange aversion—probably because of its exposed position. As he grew to man's estate he became abnormally proud and would accept no charity, but insisted upon working for whatever was accorded him, rejecting even food and shelter unless he was allowed to repay with labor. But as he aged his incompetence grew to indescribable proportions, and his benefactors were constantly put to it to keep him fed and clothed. And, too, as he became the more defenseless, the children of the village took upon themselves the happy task of making his life miserable. No shame to them! Cruelty is the natural attribute of consciousness, Mercy an acquired quality.

David had one defender, however—Judith Nyte. But it is not to be supposed that her championship of the old man was some precocious "quality of mercy." More probably it was a scorn of her contemporaries. However, whether through this artificial tenderness for suffering, or whether she did, after all, develop a sense of mercy phenomenally early, the fact

remains that Judith could not stand by and see anything, human or animal or insect, tormented, without throwing herself into its defense and upon its tormentor, and always with a fury which soon enough called for numbers unless she was to have her way.

The incident with which we are presently concerned occurred one day when old David, forgetting his usual caution, passed by the village school at the moment of its exodus. Instantly he was surrounded by a shrieking, laughing mob of children, joyously bent upon driving the old man to some ridiculous excess of rage. Judith, coming out last with "Teacher," saw tears of fright in David's eyes, and in the excess of rage his tormentors had aimed for David, the tall girl dashed into the mêlée. In three minutes she was the pedestal for an ever increasing pile of girls and boys who resented, in no gentle temper, the blows and epithets the wild girl had hurled indiscriminately upon them. Poor Miss Liner, the aged spinster known to the village as "Teacher," was as helpless to control the little savages as old David himself, and ran with him, calling for help.

What consciousness Judith's rage had left her was fast evaporating under the blows and smothering weight of her assailants when she saw them scattered and heard their cries of dis-

may and pain. Then feeling herself lifted in arms which hurt her, she opened her bruised eyes and looked upon the face of—Romance! Heard his voice saying:

"Cowards!" and "Where do ye live, girl?"

She told him and clung to him till at her door he put her down and walked away whistling a merry tune, his mind instantly turned to his own affairs. Judith watched him out of sight—the boldest, the strongest, the most splendid! And from that moment—no, from the moment when she had opened her eyes to look into his, pitying, approving, laughing, gave herself up to love—she was nine years old—and watched him from afar.

But now after three years, face to face with him again, her soul prostrated itself. And small wonder. For at eighteen John Strong was a veritable god. His six feet three and a half towered above the men of Eyre, Tom Rorth only excepted. And his Viking head with its early beard and curling moustache, blue eyes in a wide forehead crowned by waving blond hair, the gentle, firm mouth showing strong white teeth as he talked, and the power of his personality compelling even those who would resist to yield, must indeed have made a deep impression upon the passionate, romantic girl who stood thus contemplating her idol.

And when, his man business concluded, Lyaeus turned indifferent glance upon the staring girl, and smiled into her sombre eyes, these enshrined his image and Eve's daughter began her spinning.

"I'll take a run down to the ways and have a look at the schooner's bottom, sir," said the new captain. "I'm thinkin' a bit o' scrapin' 'll do no harm."

"I'll get th' keys," spoke up the girl and followed John with them.

He whistled a tune as he strode, Judith running much of the way to keep abreast.

"Ye'll need a power o' sail mendin', John Strong," she said. "I'll do it for ye if ye like."

"I would not," he answered definitely.

"An' why?" she demanded, jerking at his arm to stop his rapid stride.

He shook her off. "I want no help from no one, girl. Give me the keys an' go your way home. Women an' the like be in the way about a boat."

She was inclined to resist his command but thought better of it.

"'Women an' the like!'" she quoted him, laughing. Then, scorn in her tone—"You be a great conceited one at that, John Strong. Who do ye think brought ye into the world at all? Can ye not answer that now," and

throwing the keys at his feet she turned and left him.

John picked up the bunch, and without so much as a glance, went on his way. He had no time for girls; man's work was his concern and man's eyes his world.

To Judith her father's amazing behavior was quite comprehensible. She had long realized that his hardness was but a blind for his pain, and with her realization had come to the girl a determination to assuage the pain and so lift the blind. But her father's conduct had inevitably reflected upon his daughter and though there was none in the village who did not like or admire Judith Nyte, partly for her dead mother's sake, it's true, yet there was none but shunned her as one marked. At school and at play the children of Eyre made mock of the silent girl. Those who dared, that is. But as Judith grew in stature and understanding, these became fewer until none remained. For Judith brooked no mocking she could prevent. Fortunately for the girl's future, she was naturally sunny tempered, a born optimist. She was not touchy nor looked for trouble. Therefore she found it not difficult to ignore the others and to make a life for herself, which, if not altogether satisfying, at least gave her pride to rest on. This situation threw the child and her father

much together. To Horner Nyte it gave the saving grace of a new interest and, in the end, an absorbing love. To Judith, the developing influence of a mature and solitary mind. And to both the inestimable gift of another's need.

But to Eyre the amazing behavior of Captain Nyte was more than a nine days' wonder. And the effect of this wonder was, not so strangely perhaps, an enormous increase to an already high respect for the young man who had bearded his enemy and come off with the honors. The man who could get around old Hornfist could do anything he'd set his mind to do, was the consensus of opinion in the village. And this was very nearly true. The man who can influence men against their wills is a leader of men. And to such the world bows obedience.

When John picked up the keys which Judith had so rudely flung at his feet, and resumed his giant stride toward the boat sheds, Judith turned to look at him, and as she watched him out of sight, there came to the enamoured child a sudden desire to see his home. She knew them all well enough. Elspeth Strong had been one of the few, Parson another, who had not made the girl feel her father's ostracism. Without giving the desire a moment's reflection, Judith went straight up to the headland cottage and, finding the door on the latch, walked in.

"Good day to ye, Mrs. Strong," she said, nodding and smiling from the table against which she leaned—now that she was there, not quite so sure of herself or her welcome as a moment before.

"Judith!" the older woman said in surprise, "'tis you, child. An' welcome ye are." And then as the girl said nothing but gazed about her at the walls, the rafters, the furniture of the big room—"Have ye come to find John, then?"

"I have not." Judith shook her head. "I've come to see the child Neil."

A straighter way to the mother's heart was not, and before Judith left the cottage that day, she was what she wished to be, potentially one of its inmates.

When John came home for supper and was told of Judith's visit, he thought no more of it than that his mother was pleased. The girl herself did not figure in his thoughts at all. His mind was too full of his plans and ambitions to give room to such things as the vagaries of a child's conduct. When that morning he had picked up the keys and turned his back on Judith, she had gone as completely out of his mind as though she had never been, and he strode on down to the boat sheds occupied with his doubts and determinations as to the schooner

he was on the way to inspect. He feared a little her condition, and wondered a little where he was to get the material to put her in shape for the season. He had no intention of nursing her through, but meant that, whatever her condition, she should do the work of two.

When he reached the sheds he inspected the hull from stem to stern, inside and out, got down the sails and rigging, and was relieved to find things in much better shape than he had been led to expect. He set himself now to decide the minimum of what was needed to make the schooner fit for sea. His next consideration was a crew. He went over in his mind the likely lads of the place, and picked his men. Then he sought out Long Jim Fein, a man of forty-odd, and offered him the berth as mate.

Long Jim gave him a mirthless grin for answer. "What you doin', John Strong, wi' yer hirin' men to work for ye, when so far as I knows ye've not a week's wages to pay a man with?"

"I'm askin' nothin' I can't pay for, Long Jim, as ye know very well, seein' ye've known me from a boy——" He was eighteen when he spoke.

" 'Tis a risk," Long Jim said. "How do ye know old Hornfist'll hold to his bargain?"

"I'll hold him to it," John answered, and

went on quickly: "The schooner's needin' new canvas, she needs paintin' and mostly runnin' gear, but her spars are good, an' all equipment that's needed for one season. We'll make the canvas do a season's work an' refit next year. I've had a talk with Harvey, the sail maker, an' he's willin' to wait for his money on my note."

"Ye'll be deep as a well in debt to old Hornfist, John Strong," Long Jim warned.

"My business," John answered. "Do ye take me?"

"Your business, is it? How about my wage? I take ye on one condition."

"Name it."

"That wages comes first."

"Take it or leave it," John said, with a touch of hauteur of which he was quite unconscious, "I want no man in my crew that don't trust his cap'm."

Long Jim laughed aloud, and John turned on his heel, flushing angrily. He hadn't meant to make an ass of himself, but the older man's laugh had a something in it which made John feel his youth painfully.

"Hold hard!" Long Jim called after him, "I was only teasin'. Sure I'll take ye."

But John paid no attention. His dignity was at stake and he could not afford chances of the sort, he thought. Once let the older man

think he was needed and he'd be worse than useless. But on the way home he regretted his anger and wished mightily that he'd taken a less conclusive tone in the matter. For he knew there was not a better mate nor a more adventurous fisherman in the Islands. Long Jim was the man he wanted and must have. " 'Tis a lesson to me," he said to himself.

But he worried himself unnecessarily. Long Jim was a man of experience and a reckless sailor and he loved a risk for its own sake. And in this youthful captain he saw more than a fisherman He too regretted his chaffing but having no dignity to lose he sought John at the headland cottage and offered his services.

"I'll waive guarantee," he said. "Who are ye takin' on for the dories?"

John repeated the names he had in mind. Mere boys, most of them, some of whom might have had to wait years for a chance to sail.

"Hm, a young crowd," Long Jim commented. "We ought to make some speed wi' boys like that."

"Ay," John said, "I want nobody that's afraid of a duckin'. These lads'll go where I tell 'em to go an' they'll not be knowin' it all like such men as Garret, an' Crawford and them."

Long Jim hid a smile behind his hand, and

began to wonder if the old *Dolphin* would hold this young conqueror.

"I see," he said, nodding approval, "ye mean to go to sea in all weathers."

"Ay, an' make two trips to the rest's one. There'll be no layin' round in bunks an' playin' cards round th' galley stove in heavy weather. We go to sea for fish an' we'll bring the fish home. That's the sort of a job ye're takin' on, Jim."

Long Jim laughed again, but this time there was a touch of respect in his mirth which was not lost on his new captain.

With a greater spread of canvas, old and patched as it was, and lower deck houses and John Strong at the tiller, the *Dolphin* outsailed and outmanoeuvered the entire fleet the first time they took her to sea. Old Captain Nyte was beside himself with pride and a sense of vindicated love for the old vessel. And when the end of the season found him on the way to rehabilitated fortunes he took John's hand in his and made him a full partner.

Next season the *Dolphin* sailed with new canvas. Her superiority to every other boat in the fleet was demonstrated time after time, and the rivalry between John Strong and Tom Rorth sprang to full stature. But Tom was beaten at every turn in spite of the fact that

CHAPTER IV

Judith Nyte had watched and approved the progress of her Viking with that intensity of interest which only the single of purpose may know. She had seen John Strong grow from boy to man, from man to leader, and as each step in his advance became imminent, she had looked forward to the next. That first season of John's as master fisherman and captain found Judith more than daughter to Elspeth Strong. The day the schooner sailed carrying Horner Nyte as super cargo, the girl went up to the cottage on the headland.

"Elspeth," she said, "I'll bide with you till the fleet's home bound."

"Ay, Judith, an' what'll yer own house do wi'out ye?"

Judith laughed and went on into the bedroom where the babe lay bawling. Turning at the door, she said: "The house 'll not run away, I'm thinkin'."

"Ye're a good child, Judith," Elspeth told her gratefully.

But—"I'm no child," the older woman was informed, "I'm a woman grown. My father says it himself."

This was true, for Judith had grown from child to woman almost without suffering the intervening period of girlhood. And from that moment when she had for the first time beheld her ideal face to face she had looked forward to her life's fulfilment as the wife of John Strong. She was essentially simple, essentially one-ideaed.

Now her intention was to take the care and education of Neil Strong upon her young shoulders. He was a sickly child and required a deal of waiting on. His mother had never completely recovered her strength since that day when death and life had come into her home almost at one and the same moment, and she found the work of the cottage unaccountably wearing at times. She accepted Judith's assistance as simply as the girl offered it, and from that day forward the two were as mother and daughter. Elspeth came to depend on the great healthy girl with the same confidence that she felt in her big son. No task was too heavy for Judith's strong body, no work too irksome for her intensive energy, and for the first time in her arduous life Elspeth found herself a chimney-corner woman. She'd sit for hours, her black pipe between her teeth, gazing into the embers and thinking her thoughts while Judith went about the house or the village attending to the older

woman's welfare. And many the time she took the girl in her arms and wept her gratitude and love.

Judith was as grateful for the opportunity presented her to be one of John's faithful household, but expressed her gratitude in deeds of service. And John accepted this gratuitous service with the same indifferent matter-of-course attitude that he showed all homage. That it saved his mother work and worry, served his baby brother and benefitted himself directly and indirectly was not lost to his observation, but that any expression of his knowledge or evidence of his gratitude was expected from him, never once confronted his point of view. People did what they wished to do, in this world, or what they were forced to do. Judith was not forced to give her time and service, and that she wished to give it was not astonishing in any degree. Everyone liked to serve him, John Strong, as invariably everyone liked to serve power. He gave no thought to these things, they were part of life and as long as they did themselves he was unconcerned with the whys and wherefors. Nor was this a pose with him but part and parcel of his character. That the girl thought no more of it than did the man is evidence that in this at least she was very much like him. But she went further and was thankful. It

gave her easily what she might otherwise have had to strive for, and her mind, as keen as John's—keener in these matters—was not slow to recognize this advantage.

What the village had to say on the matter concerned neither of these strong wills. If they thought of it at all they thought of it with indifference. They were a law unto themselves—true of the man, at any rate, and in this respect of the girl, too. But Judith was by nature and inclination religious, and this alone held her to wisdom in her dealings with John. As for him, if unwisdom teased him he gave no sign.

But Nature is a jade, a wanton, a wicked and insidious tempter, and withal a vindictive crusher of rebellion.

John Strong was no mere athlete, training and dieting for a supreme effort, but a man whose mind and muscles were under constant strain of effort, and whose diet was the simple hearty fare of his class and occupation. A man among men. And his desires were held in check by nothing stronger than his inclinations toward a clean life. This was enough under normal circumstances—is enough for any man not in love—but for the girl—she was in love. Her strength of body was as great as the man's—always remembering her sex—and her need the greater in

that her instinct was the stronger. But Judith had the weight of her orthodox belief in the Word of God to throw into the balance. She fought Nature with God; John fought her with his contempt of weakness. The end was inevitable—a misconception of self, for both of them, of aims, of a hundred truths, like themselves essentially simple, in normal conditions, but in these, distorted, diminished. magnified as the moment might decree. And above all, impossible to foresee.

But while they chose to ignore the village's opinion of them and their "doin's," the village buzzed like a busy hive.

"A cruel shame, I say. Ol' Hornfist bain't a man of sense, that's sure," Norton remarked to his mate, Ike Crawford, as John and Judith passed Malcolm's on their way to the landing place.

"Ol' Hornfist? What's he to do 'bout it? He's all for marryin' th' girl to John, ye can bet yer boots on that, an' win."

"Marry? Ay, why don't they marry? Tell me that?"

"Don't have to, maybe." A reply which found a proper appreciation.

"Parson should take a hand an' make 'em. He's the boy to see to it."

Malcolm grunted at this. "Pazz'n! Pazz'n's

bewitched 'esel'. Zazs as 's not a better vemale in th' Islan's. Zalt o' th' earth, 'e calls un."

"So she is," Tom Rorth said, and got up and went out into the sunshine.

Malcolm nodded, pursing his lips in a distorted grin, and jerked his head sidewise in the direction Tom had taken.

Garret laughed. "'Tom's daft on her. They'll be a rumpus some fine day, I'm thinkin'."

There was general agreement to this in Malcolm's boat house.

But interest in the affair was not confined to the men of Eyre. And that Judith paid no heed to the significant glances and stares of her feminine neighbors was not so strange as they insisted on imagining. For Judith had long been accustomed to a coldness from them, due to her father's unpopularity; an unpopularity which lingered many years after his change of heart and manners.

Sure of her own integrity, Judith, like John, took the opinions of others as a matter of no consequence, that is, so long as one didn't have to listen to them.

Judith had begun Neil's education taking his future for granted. He came of generations of fishermen and as a potential fisherman she regarded him. But it was soon evident to her that this boy was not like others. He seemed

almost completely unable to absorb understanding of the ordinary mechanics of everyday life, while for the extraordinary he had a keenness of perception which left his mentor breathless with wonder. And when one day he told her of a creature which came to him at night and which lived during the day at the bottom of the sea, a creature fantastic but vivid, Judith was frightened out of her wits. The story was pure invention, but she thought the child in delirium and ran to Elspeth, who wrung her hands and wept, while Neil looked on in mischievous glee till he realized that he was suspected of some fearful thing, then he went into such a passion of tears that Judith was sent hot haste for Parson.

By the time he arrived Neil was in such a condition of nervous terror that it was hours before the parson could come at the trouble. When he did get to it he laughed at them all three, instantly putting Neil right with himself.

He talked long to the child and discovered only what he had suspected for some time past, but nothing more alarming than a precocious mind in a backward body.

"He's like your son John, Elspeth," he told them, soothing the mother's fears, "his mind be bigger than most, that be all. You must be careful with him and not let him be frightened

of things. If he needs punishments when he's bad like, then is the time you must be carefuler than ever. He's a sickly little one and that drives him to use his tiny brain as he'd not be doin' if he had his body's strength like his brother."

"Ah, Parson," the mother begged, "you be the one to know. You must help me to teach him the things he should be taught. I blames myself sore sometimes that John was not taught right from the beginnin' of his life. He's not so good at church goin' as I'd have him nor as his father'd have wished for."

And this worry, too, Parson soothed away. "The Lord will take care of all these things in His own way, Elspeth. If John is not a church goer, he's still a fine upstandin' man for so young a boy, an' I've no doubt when he grows to manhood full, he'll be comin' into the church in time. I'll not leave him out, ye may be sure of that. Ay," he went on, "I'll never rest till that fine boy is as good a churchman as ever his dear father was before him. An' it's such men as John will some day be, that we be needin' for our church. A great example he is to the whole Island, I'm thinkin'."

So Neil was brought up by Elspeth and Judith and Parson. John leaving all such things to the women and the minister, for in spite of his de-

fiance of Parson's teachings, he respected the older man's judgment and acknowledged his wisdom in all affairs mundane.

On his short stays between voyages and in the long winter months at home, John delighted to indulge the baby. As to punishment, he would not hear of the gentlest.

"Let the boy have his head," he'd say, "an' if he grows up a man 'll be time enough to knock his foolishness out of him. Life's none too easy on none of us. I'll not see his childhood made a school. Let him be happy while he don't know enough to be unhappy."

This accorded well with Elspeth's desire. She was like a hen with one chick. John's great strength and abundant self-sufficiency left his mother no opportunity to expend herself for him, and all the yearning of her loss and gain went into her thought for Neil. John stood to the situation as father more than brother and son. He was the provider and authority. The head of the house And the baby's weakness of health made an exaggerated appeal to the tenderness of the women. If ever child was spoiled, Neil Strong was spoiled. That it did not bring sorrow to them all was partly due to the child's ill health, which, while it made him often peevish and querulous, kept him successfully out of mischief; but most to his abnormally affectionate

temperament. The least word of censure from either Elspeth or Judith gave him such agonies of remorse that control was simple. It was inevitable, therefore, that he should become the center of his mother's universe, her first thought on waking, her last before sleep, and all day the pivot around which her life revolved. John did not need her—Neil did. And to this need she gave all, not knowing. But strangely enough Neil knew. As early as his sixth or seventh year, he spoke of the trouble he gave because of his weakness of body, and of his gratitude to them for indulgence and care. Elspeth spent the entire night on her knees, alternately thanking God for this gift of understanding in the child, and begging Him to blind the boy's eyes to her adoration, that he might not feel the burden of an obligation which was but the passionate outpouring of her love. When John heard of it he stood for minutes gazing at the boy with his heart in his eyes. "Think of that, now!" he murmured over and over, "a kiddie like that!" It was incredible to his mind that anyone could feel the need of gratitude for love bestowed, and to him of all people! But for a mere babe to know—know that he was different from others, and to realize the significance of his difference, touched the depths of the strong man's emotional nature, buried out of sight even of his

own consciousness. And from that moment the center of his interests became a desire to make the child forget his disabilities. Every activity of the household was pointed toward this center, and Judith and Parson were enlisted in a conspiracy of deception For a time it was successful, but as Neil grew older and began to see something of the life about him, it but served to emphasize his weakness and impress upon his sensitive soul the burden his mere existence imposed upon the people he loved. This did not trouble him for his big brother, or for Judith. They were strong enough to bear any burden which they were willing to assume, but for Elspeth his tender heart often ached. He exaggerated her sufferings until he felt he could not bear the contemplation of them, and went one day to Parson to beg some way out for her. And the good man laughed his troubles away for him.

"Women, Neil, they be strange creatures," he said. "They can find more happiness in a word of love than a man might in a sack of gold. What your mother does to make life easy for you is her dearest wish. And the thing you can do to make her happy, is never to let her see you know what she's doin'. John, now, gives her his great strength to lean on, let you give her love. She'll not work herself too hard.

There's always plenty to help her when she needs help. Judith will be takin' the hardest off her shoulders this winter."

When the boy was gone home comforted, Parson sought Judith to warn her that their conspiracy was discovered.

"Let him do whatever he can do," he said, "he'll only grow to hate himself if he's let to see that he's useless. The boy thinks too much for one of his years, we must find a way to make him interested in other things than himself. Teach him to row, and if you find him tire, ease up but don't make it too easy for him. Keep him out doors and in the boats and teach him swimmin' maybe I'll answer for John. He'll take my way when I tell him——" he broke off. "No, I'm thinkin' John had better not know. He'd only be worse and coddle the lad to his harm."

"John's a fool!" cried Judith. "He's blind. He can't see that Neil knows more in a minute than he, with all his great body and masterful ways, will ever learn in his whole life."

"He's no fool, girl," Parson said, surprised by Judith's vehemence. "If he's blind at all it's his pride has blinded him, but there's not a better man in all the Islands than John Strong, if you know how to reach his self."

"Aye," the girl said scornfully, "if you

know how to reach through the thickest coverin' o' pride a man has covered up his self behind, I'm thinkin'. But ye need have no fear, Parson, I'll do as ye tell me with the lad, though I don't know what's to become of the boy when he's a man grown. He'll be no manner o' use in the Islands with no strength in his body and the far seein' brain in his head. If he was but dull witted now, like old David."

Little Neil was just ten years old at this time, and Judith had reached maturity. She had been like a daughter to Elspeth these years, and to John a sister. She slept at the Strong cottage as often as not, and when John came home from his voyages and when he was winter bound, and could not roam the sea in his schooner, he leaned on Judith's love and interest which were poured without stint for his use, as on a thing his by right, but that she loved him as a woman never once entered his mind. He was too close to the picture, as it were, to see it in detail; too absorbed in his dreams; enclosed in the cocoon of his egoistic ambitions.

Tom Rorth had watch the absorption of Judith into this cocoon with, first, jealous resignation and—urged on by the buzzing of the village—a slowly growing resentment. In Malcolm's boat house he had replied to someone's idle surmising with: "It's a lie," and was instantly chal-

lenged by a dozen voices. He squinted into the bowl of his pipe, as he held it up to catch a point of light at the bottom of it, before he took up the challenge, then, apparently satisfied with the pipe, a ruse to gain the time for his words, which with Tom never came too easily, he put it in his pocket and folding his arms, said:

"Ay, 'tis a lie. I'm no believer John Strong's the man he thinks himself, but no more's he the man you'd make him out to be. An' if he was that sort, Judith Nyte's not the sort to stay by him."

"Ye're such a believer in the girl, Tom, why don't ye marry her then, an' have done with such a scandal in th' place?"

"I'll marry her today if she'll have me," Tom said, with difficulty holding his anger under, "an' if she will or if she won't, I'll break the back of the next man as says a word ag'in' her when I'm about."

"Will ye take us one at a time, Tom, or will ye crack us all at th' one go?"

In the covering guffaws this sally brought upon him, Tom left the boat house and went up to the headland cottage.

"No, I'll not come in," he said in reply to John's invitation, "I've somewhat to say to ye, alone."

"Sure," John answered and stepped out into

the garden, then brittle under more than two months of ice.

"Judith——" Tom began, then stopped. He'd found a task he was unfitted for. After a pause he said: "I'm askin' ye, man to man, what ye intend to Judith Nyte, John Strong?"

John took time to be sure of Tom's meaning before he answered, then he said quietly: "An' I'll tell you to mind yer own business, Tom Rorth."

Tom spat. "That's what I'm doin', man," he said emphatically. "Ye're a fool if ye think I'm a meddler. I love the girl an' I'll see fair play for her or you'll answer to me!"

John stared at him a moment while he took in the significance of the other's statement. Then he held out his hand and said heartily: "Tom, I ask your pardon. What I can do for ye I'll do with all my heart. Judith'll make ye a fine wife, an' that's the truth, for I know the girl she is as few else knows it." And for a good half hour he talked of Judith's goodness and great heart, and told with scrupulous attention to detail, of her kindness to his mother and thoughtful care of Neil.

Tom listened to it all with an appreciative silence, though the more he thought it over afterwards the less he seemed to see in the situation to like. But his confidence in John was

cemented by the interview—whatever his failings, John Strong was no "dirty cur"—and went far toward stemming the rising tide of wrath of the male element in the village, which once stemmed soon ceased to flow, as is the way of men.

John watched with interest—mixed of regret and gladness—for a few days, but when nothing seemed to come of the affair, he soon forgot it.

But Tom Rorth didn't forget it. He got no peace now. What with his love for Judith and his championship of John he was the target for obviously veiled witticisms in the boat house, and in his own breast sharp stabs of jealousy.

He had never spoken to Judith on this matter of his heart's desire, for in her presence he was a man whose veins ran water. But he began to see now that his only hope of peace from himself or his fellows was to ask her and get it over.

He went to the imposing Nyte homestead, rehabilitated now almost out of recognition, and stood at the gate for a long time trying to make up his mind to push it open and stride boldly up the brick walk, as he knew only too well John Strong would have done had he been there bent upon the same errand.

Judith was in the kitchen, when she heard her father calling her.

"Ay, dad?"

"Tom Rorth's at the gate."

She went to the window.

"Seems like he's afraid to come in," Captain Nyte said. "That's the tenth time he's opened the gate an' shut it ag'in, if it's once."

"Ay," Judith mused. She knew what Tom was there for. "Wants to get a loan, likely," she said indifferently.

"I'm no lendin' money now. Tom knows that."

He put an arm around Judith's waist and gave her a little squeeze. "Will ye have him, daughter?"

"He hasn't asked me," she said, and went out by the front door and down the garden walk. "Come in, Tom," she called.

Tom came in and then went back and shut the gate thoughtfully as though it were the door to a sick room.

"Ye want to see my father?" Judith asked, and before he could reply, "He's not home. Will I do?"

"Ay," Tom said huskily, "it's you I've come to talk to, Judith."

"Oh," she murmured, surprised beyond measure, "me?"

"Ay, you," he said directly, but could get no further. He kicked at a loosened brick for several minutes till Judith cautioned him not

to displace it, then he stammered her name over and over until she laughed.

"What's it, Tom? I know my name's Judith, by this."

"Ay, don't tease," he begged her, catching at his throat as though he were about to be choked, "I'll make ye a good husban', Judith, if—Judith ——" He looked round quickly as if afraid he might be overheard, and Judith laughed again.

"Not me, Tom," she said gently enough, "I'm not for marryin' yet awhile."

"Ye'd marry John Strong quick enough if he'd ask ye," he said angrily, and as she made no reply, "Eh?"

"I'll answer that when he does ask me," she said quietly, but there was a dangerous light in her eyes.

Tom dug at the brick again, but seemed unable to find words to plead his cause. Judith waited a moment or two and then went slowly back to the house and shut the door after her.

Tom made to follow her but thought better of it, and turning on his heel went out of the garden, closing the gate with more decision than when he'd come in through it.

Inside the house Captain Nyte took Judith by the shoulders and forced her to look at him.

"Why don't ye take him?" he asked.

"I don't want him," she answered sullenly.

"I'd like to see ye settled before I go," he pleaded. "It's no use a waitin' for a man as——"

She stopped him with a hand on his lips.

"I'll wait," she said, "use or no use."

He kissed her cheek and let her go.

For a long time the old captain brooded over this determination of his daughter's, and then one day when Judith was away visiting her cousin, Lisal Wender, he sent for John Strong.

John went up the brick walk as Tom Rorth had pictured him doing it, and Captain Nyte opened the door to him.

"Good day to ye, John," he said. "Come in."

John stepped inside and took off his cap.

"I'd a mind to come an' have a talk with you," he said as he sat down.

"Ay?" Captain Nyte looked at him eagerly.

"Ay, I've long been thinkin' it's time we came to a new arrangement."

The old man's mind was so filled with thoughts of his daughter that for the moment he took for granted that it was of her John had come to speak.

"Ye think that, do ye?" he said, glad that he was to be spared the embarrassment of opening the subject.

"Ay," John went on. "Th' *Dolphin's* needin'

overhaulin' from cutwater to counter, an' I've a mind to go it on my own after this.'

"Ah!"

Captain Nyte realized his mistake.

"I'm willin' to buy her, at a fair price, if you are willin' to sell, but if not I was thinkin' I'd take a look round over to Wesleys Haven. There's some fine schooners comes out from there. A new model. Seaworthy boats, they say, an' fast, too, though I've yet to see their heels when it's racin' weather." He laughed. "But that's not so much the boats as the skippers, I'm thinkin'."

Captain Nyte was too taken aback by the turn of circumstance to find words for his own intention, and the more he sought a way to turn the conversation, the more hopeless he became. He sat silent, immobile, save for now and again a grunt or a nod of acquiescence, though he heard very little of what his young partner was saying. He was thinking—how men change!—but of himself, not of John. And when some half hour later John took his departure, the old fisherman found himself no longer a partner—no longer an owner.

It was a raw day in early February. The clouds hung low over a gray sea, and a damp haze hid the far horizon, shutting in the island as though from all the universe of light

and cheer. From where he sat, through the long window, he could see the inner bay, still under the piled hummocks of ice—a frozen sea, indeed, motionless, lifeless, finished, like the death of a man, turned cold and ready for the grave.

He was glad now that he had not carried out his intention to speak to John Strong of his daughter. He might have known—did know—he thought, that the man was too capable a personage to take suggestions in a matter of such delicacy—and Judith—she would never have forgiven him . . . But . . . but . . . If he could only have given her this thing—this happiness, he could go, satisfied, to meet that dear girl wife he'd lost . . . so long . . . so long . . . so——

He put his hand to the pocket over his heart and took out a cracked and faded photograph of Judith's mother, and held it with both hands. His head drooped forward on his broad chest, and with trembling lips he whispered:

"'So long Thy power has blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on
O'er moor . . . an' fen . . . o'er crag and torrent, till
Th' night is gone;
. . . An' with th' morn . . . those angel faces smile,
Which I had loved . . . long since . . . an' lost awhile.'"

And Judith found him so, when she came home at dusk.

When, next day, John heard of the old captain's death he was shocked, immeasurably, but glad, immeasurably, too, that he'd bought the *Dolphin* and dissolved the partnership. His second reaction was for Judith.

"She'll be all alone now," he said to his mother. "She must come an' stay here." And at the first decent opportunity he put it to her.

With an arm about his mother's waist he turned a little awkwardly to Judith.

"So, girl, you be left alone now. I would like you make our home yours for as long as ye care to stay, or always, if it please you. Eh, mother?"

"Ay, I can think of naught would please me more," Elspeth answered.

"Ye'd like that, would you, John?" Judith said. "Well, it'll be a long time before ye'll see me leave my home for another, I'm thinkin'." And in the pause which followed, looking full at him, she added: "What d'ye think I am, John Strong?" She waited no answer but got up and went out of the house.

John stared after her as though his skies had fallen, then to his mother he gasped: "What's wrong with the girl?"

Elspeth shook her head and turned away, but

said nothing. It didn't occur to John to ask an explanation of Neil, who no doubt could have given him the answer. But when on the morrow Judith was back at her tasks, which she seemed to accept as duties, saving Elspeth in a thousand ways, John ceased to puzzle the mystery. All was right with his world, and he had no mind to meddle. But it came to him, now, that in Eyre he had reached the pinnacle of his life's possibilities. His schooner was not all that he might have wished, but his handling of her put him the more to the forefront of skippers, for when he held the tiller she was unbeatable, and when anyone else took her out she showed herself a laggard. Long Jim Fein, his second in command, a reckless sailor and a man of experience, had been beaten over and over again by Tom Rorth's *Petrel,* while John leaned against the rail and laughed at Long Jim's rage.

Through the long winter evenings John sat and brooded his dreams, and to Judith alone he opened his mind. Out on the point of the promontory these two would stand, or stride the hill paths back from the sea in the keen north wind and zero weather, while the village hugged its firesides.

This great Viking of a man whose sea-blue eyes pierced you through, whose mighty laugh

could be heard above the roar of winter's gale, whose indomitable courage and force of character had won success and fame for him—for John Strong's achievements were the wonder of the islands and in time would be woven into the folklore of these simple, brave and hardy people. And beside him, wind-blown, smiling, sturdy, the splendid figure of the girl; within a half inch of six feet tall, deep bosomed, dark eyed, beautiful; as strong as a man and as brave. She was an elemental. Man's mate—and he the man. Not Jupiter and Juno! No, Adam and Eve!

And John talked of his dreams. He wanted room to stretch, he said. Eyre was getting too small for him. He would have the most beautiful boat in the world, and the fastest. He wanted to learn, too. Parson had said things to him he would answer, and he knew not how.

And Judith talked of his dreams. She urged him on, her ambitions but his dreams fulfilled. And always she saw herself by his side—his wife—his helpmeet—the mother of his splendid sons.

What came of these talks for John was a growing appreciation of the smallness of his world and an irresistible desire to investigate the larger one. He felt sure of himself yet he would corroborate his certitudes. That, at any

rate, was his interpretation of his restlessness. True, indeed, so far as it went, but missing the key after all. The key was the need of the strong—perpetual conquest.

What came of them for Judith, was a perilous balancing—a pyramiding, as it were, of rising floods of passion, dammed higher and higher, overflowing banks and boundaries, to water all sorts of latent growths, until who could say what might not be carried away by the bursting or sudden letting down of those inhibiting walls?

CHAPTER V

Neil Strong lived an inward life, as he grew to youthhood. He could find no response to his visions among those about him, for theirs was a practical world and life a fight. But dimly he came to feel that his physical weakness was not unmixed evil. It gave him time for dreams.

Judith had obeyed Parson's instructions and taught the boy to row and swim. He found his strength increase under the stimulus of outdoor air and mild exercise, and his desire for solitude recognized freedom in physical independence. It was not long, therefore, to the time when he was capable of handling a boat alone in fine weather. In his small craft on calm days the boy spent many hours. He took to rowing out to Gull Rock, from where he had a clear view of the open sea, and here he would lie hour after hour in the warm sun, weaving his fantastic visions.

John, watching with anxiety the first time Neil essayed this feat, was inordinately proud, as though every simple accomplishment of the little lad's were a miracle indeed.

As Neil's strength grew and with it his confidence, he essayed greater feats than the short half mile to Gull Rock. But with the artfulness of the true aesthetic kept his own counsel. Thus he was free to do what he wished to do and at the same time free from those distracting odd jobs about the house, which, had anyone suspected his ability, would have become his by a sort of automatic adjustment.

About a mile beyond the inner bay was the lighthouse builded upon a rock ledge and surrounded by open sea. Venturing the long row, one calm day in early June, Neil found a friend —the light keeper. A solitary old man who lived in the tiny house out of which the tower sprang like an overgrown spire. When Neil asked him his name the old man replied that he had none, but that he might be called Bruno, since it could harm no one and might save a deal of trouble. Make believe! Neil was instantly a disciple.

The boy's reading, so far, had been confined exclusively to the Bible. He had not been sent to school, Judith had taken upon herself his education, and Parson had supplemented her. But in the lighthouse he found the government books, exchanged every so often, and here his real education began. Theirs was a small world. Bruno had seen the big one in his day. He'd

been a seaman—merchant marine, navy, revenue service, but for more years than Neil's on earth he'd been the solitary keeper of Eyre light. Of simple origin and limited education, his mental grasp was hardly deeper than the boy's. It was not long, therefore, before Neil was the expounder while Bruno sat a disciple. "Robinson Crusoe," "Treasure Island" and other tales of the sea, of shipwreck and the like, were Bruno's taste, but when one exchange brought Scott's "Ivanhoe" and "The Talisman," it was all up with the keeper. He had nothing in him with which to respond to the age of chivalry.

But to Neil these stories were exciting to the point of harm. And more than once Bruno had to see him safely home, or in sight of it.

After one of these times, Neil having skilfully concealed about his person the book they had been reading, went, as soon as he could manage to elude observation, to the loft over the cottage living-room, where, lying close to the little window in the gable, he became absorbed in the tale and gave over reading only when the light had completely failed. Then, sneaking cautiously out to the shed, he discovered a disused lantern. This he filled with oil and after great labor of mind and expenditure of crafty ingenuity, managed to get to the loft again, unobserved. Crawling through the trapdoor at

the top of the ladder and letting it down with the utmost caution, he knelt to light the lantern. As the light burned brightly he saw close to his hand two great books. Taking them in his arms he carried them with his lantern to a far corner of the loft and proceeded to investigate them.

The books were Dante's "Inferno" and the "Paradise Lost" of Milton.

Toward midnight Neil was discovered asleep in the loft, his face resting on the open "Inferno," and the entire village gave thanks. For several hours they had been searching far and wide, and had become convinced that he was drowned. Someone with the merest pertinacity of idle hope had suggested the loft, and there he was. The boy and the books were brought down and sensation followed sensation.

Neil steadfastly refused to answer—where had he found such wicked books? He was so wrought up with the nervous excitement of the reading he had done and the village's discovery of his secret that he was fit only for a sick bed. Elspeth was useless, crying that God had visited them with sorrow and shame, and exciting the boy to such a degree that Parson took him to his own cottage and put him to bed and, with infinite patience, to sleep. Then the good man took the books into his study and

examined them. The Scott novel was plainly marked with the Government stamp, and he knew at once its source. Then he took up the "Inferno," and got so absorbed in it that dawn caught him almost as excited as his little charge.

Neil's expeditions to the lighthouse ceased for a time, and he and Parson, whenever the busy man could snatch an hour, pored over the two great poems; studied and absorbed their greatness to such effect for Parson that he grew broader and deeper in understanding. For Neil, that he neglected every other pursuit and determined to be a great poet!

For days after his adventure he wandered about alone on the headland or sat in his boat repeating the sonorous lines of Milton and Dante. Then he took to composing blank verse. Improvising, solely. It didn't occur to him to write his thoughts. He had no facilities for writing, and, too, he was fearful of discovery. Standing far out at the very point of the promontory, he would shout his verse to Boreas, and tell him to carry it to the Beloved.

But soon it became too precious to him, this poetry, to lose as soon as he had made it, and he had an itch for something tangible which he could take out and read and read and read. At Malcolm's boat shop he managed to purloin the stump of a carpenter's pencil, and from

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the shed some scraps of brown paper. With these he began his career as poet, kneeling in his boat and using the thwart for desk.

Technically his compositions were crude and childish mixtures of the Bible, Dante, Milton, but in substance they were imaginative and colorful. And soon he was consumed with desire for an audience. But he was desperately afraid of censure, and, above all, laughter. Had it been possible he would undoubtedly have resorted to Chatterton's ruse—pretended his creations the work of another—thus to get an opinion, criticism, appreciation without danger of ridicule. But his own scrawling hand was his only means of recording these immortal outpourings, and fear induced him sooner or later to destroy all but the most precious.

His cup of excitement was full when John, having heard from Elspeth of his adventure with the books and from Parson of his delight and understanding of the mysterious writings, took him aside and asked him to explain them.

Of all the unlikely surprises his quiet, uneventful world had up its sleeve, this appeal of John's seemed to Neil the most. But delight in his opportunity swamped astonishment, and he plunged into stammered exposition of the "Inferno." The "Paradise Lost" he found more difficult to talk of. It had not reached

him as the other had. The long and tedious passages of dialogue and the extraordinary number of unusual words had many times been too much for him. Too, the romance was lacking.

The old ferryman, Charon, had caught his imagination at the very beginning of the "Inferno," and many of the lines stuck in his head as having a meaning for him in particular.

> "Only so far afflicted that we live
> Desiring without hope."

That he could understand, for had he not been through it?

That the boy's interpretations were far afield, John knew well enough but cared not at all. Here was something beyond the ordinary mechanism of mere living, and without question he accepted the miracle. Vaguely he discerned the symbolism of life's surprises and gropingly endeavored to understand. Neil stood for something in his world. Was it a light? Was this strange child whom he had welcomed into life with a more than ordinary intensity of affection, to lead him, John Strong, to a truth?

He showered books upon the boy, poetry of every age and school, and studied with him when at home, as though determined to teach himself to understand. And when t[illegible]

winter was finally at hand and he could not go to sea, he sat hour upon hour, listening to Neil's voice as the boy read or improvised his own verse, or quoted his favorites. One of these:

"Resting weary limbs at last on beds of asphodel."

And one of John's:

"On the hills like gods together, careless of mankind."

And:

"The fever called living."

These and a hundred other arresting lines, stuck in John's mind and he found himself, much to his amusement, murmuring them half aloud in the midst of his work. But the one passage of all the works he had brought home from time to time, which held him at grips with wonder, was:

". . . and the clouds are lightly curl'd
Round their golden houses, girdled with the gleaming world;
Where they smile in secret, looking over wasted lands,
Blight and famine, plague and earthquake, roaring deeps and fiery sands,
Clanging fights, and flaming towns, and sinking ships and praying hands."

He did not hold it to any particular meaning, but chanted it to himself over and over, feeling vaguely the tragedy of the words, and a definite need to combat it. All these fearful

things occurring in the earth while the All Powerful looked on smiling "in secret"—"and sinking ships and *praying hands*"! And he would set his jaw grimly and clench his fists.

Elspeth could make nothing of this delving into books. She had a firm conviction that all, save only the Good Book, were products of the evil one, and said her mind to her son.

"John, ye be doin' the boy a harm wi' yer books an' readin' till all hours o' the night. What be it ye would do wi' the lad?"

"I'd make a poet of him, mother," John answered. And at her further remonstrance he laughed and told her she'd see.

She knew only too well what she'd see, and went with her trouble to Parson, who promised to speak to John.

"John," he said, "ye're goin' to make the lad ill. He's needin' the out of doors, an' anything to take his mind off such things as dreams. But this readin' o' poetry, good as it may be for one as can understand it an' knows when to stop——" He shook his head and smiled dubiously.

"Have you not yet discovered that we be not all made alike, Parson?" John asked.

Parson concealed a smile.

"John, as ye very well know, I'm a physician of bodies as well as of souls, an' I warn ye

that *nobody* can stand such readin' as you two are doin'. But not Neil, of all boys. He takes it too serious, an' the end will surely be a sickness for the lad. I tell ye again, it is the out of doors and *things*—things, not thoughts, he needs. He's stronger than you think, my son, in body, I mean."

"I'll take your warnin', Parson, an' thank ye. I've no wish to hurt Neil's health," John said. "But I'll not see him turned from his poetry. It's what he wants, an' some day maybe he'll be a poet himself, as good as the rest. What think you?"

"I've no notion, my son. I'm no judge of the like. I know only what I like for myself, an' that's no way to judge a poem."

"An' why might it not be just the way, I ask you, Parson? Surely there's no better way, than to tell what you like, an' if that's what you get, surely you know it. Why, there's poems in those books as no man could like, an' some as no man could help but love."

"That's it, my son, like as not one's good as t'other. But you've got to have knowledge of such things before ye can presume to hold judgment. Like yourself, presumin' to judge of the truth of the Word when such men as Moses and the Prophets has pronounced it truth."

"A man's reason gives him judgment, Parson, else how's he to know black from white? You're no sailor, but you judge a boat when you see one, as good as another. A man as has good judgment needn't fear to use it on a thing he's never seen before. An' I say some of them writin's of Neil's is as good as any I've brought from the mainland, maybe better."

"John, John, you be a obstinate man. I've lived on the sea since a lad. 'Course I know boats. But you'll grant me that I know more than you on the matter of doctorin', an' you'll take advice for the boy's health, so I'll let you have the last word."

John laughed. "So you give a man that, Parson, you give him all he asks as a rule. But I'll match you. What would you have me do for Neil's health?"

"Be moderate with him, John. Give him some tasks that 'll take him away from his books and keep him out of doors. The mind is a queer business, and must be cared for as much as the body."

"Very well, there'll be no more readin' in the day time. Does that satisfy your doctorin', Parson?"

"Aye, that's a beginnin' in the right direction. Then I'd have you keep his mind from his dreams. Give him his share of responsi-

bility. I don't care how little it is, but it should be something. The boy must be made to think for himself, about his daily life. He thinks only about his queer ideas now, an' they's days together that he'd not eat a mouthful if Elspeth didn't watch him."

"He shall have his tasks like the rest of us. I see your meanin'."

"He's plenty strong. Give him some of the fish carryin' to do. Let him tend the dryin' grids. Make him see the good o' bein' useful. He should not be babied no longer, he should be ready to take his share of the life around him, John. Supposin' you was taken, my son? Neil's would be the shoulders your responsibilities would fall on."

John faced the Parson, they were walking toward the village, and the turn in the road brought them to a view of the bay, which lay tranquil under the noonday sun.

"Make your mind easy about that, Parson, I shan't be 'taken,' as you call it. If I go 't will be by my own will. And I've no mind to go just yet." He laughed and slapped the older man on the shoulder, then his look darkened as he thought of his father's death. "It's you folks that own to this God of all power that are 'taken,' like my father. He was always for

leavin' things to God. Well, I leave nothin' to Him, I take care myself."

The subtle irony of John's bitterness did not escape Parson. In fact, it was his hope for this man he loved. He saw clearly what John was strangely blind to, that in his very bitterness was hidden acknowledgment of God's power.

"Ah, John," he said, "you know not what you say. If you were not the man you are, I should long ago have despaired, but what suppose you it is, has *made* you the man you are, if not God's infinite mercy and love? John, John, if God had not weighed you and found you worth His saving, you would be punished beyond your power of thought."

"I want no savin', Parson. If your God could not save my father after all the worship and thanks and beggin' prayers of his and my mother's, He can do nothin' for me that I can't do for myself. And man to man, I want no more than that."

"John, have you left one single desire in this life you have not yet fulfilled?"

John smiled. He scented a trap. The good man was always trying to trap him, and many a time he had stepped into one or another of Parson's cleverly worded mazes.

"I have," he answered. "Two, since ye ask me."

"I ask not what they are, John," Parson said, his voice taking on a sterner note, "but I'll tell ye this: You shall not be allowed the fulfillment of yer life, till ye've acknowledged God in humbleness, an' on yer knees."

The two strong men stood face to face. John held his tongue for he loved the older man almost as he had loved his father, and would have sacrificed more than the last word rather than hurt him. But he could not refrain from a good-natured rally.

"When I've fought an' lost, Parson, we'll talk again."

"May God show ye the light before too late, John," Parson said with a smile. "But I have a hope He makes me His rod of chastisement. I'd dearly love to take some of the conceit out of that strong body of yourn."

So they parted as many times they had parted; Parson to pray, to wrestle with his God, as it were, for this beloved soul. And John to forget in an hour.

John continued on down to the ways where the *Dolphin* was undergoing a complete overhauling. The strain he had put the old vessel to in these last years as he climbed to supremacy had well-nigh torn her to pieces. He had practically rebuilt her now, and meant, when she went into commission again, to show her the best

schooner in the fleet, bar none. He'd shifted his well six feet further aft, added three feet to the forward overhang and a good four to the stern; given the fore and main hoists another eighteen inches, lengthened the main boom by four feet and the bowsprit by two. Strengthened the deck beams and midship timbers; installed a wheel in place of the old tiller; painted her white with a broad gold stripe; scraped and varnished the deck houses, and rechristened her *Elspeth.*

As he reached the boat house where his men were slushing the spars, he was thinking of Parson's warnings as to Neil's health. He would be careful, but as to poetry injuring the boy, he did not for a moment believe it. He'd set himself certain things to attain, and without exception had attained them. And by nobody's advice nor help, but by his own judgment. Results! The proof of the pudding, as the old saw had it. And he justified his course with Neil by the results as he saw them. Henceforward the boy should be exempt from all but the most trivial of duties. His only confining work should be to look after his mother's health and make her as happy as might be. But he was to be a poet—a great poet, maybe. To that end had he not sat hour after hour and listened to the boy's readings in the evenings

and patiently studied out with him the meaning of what they read?

And each new creative effort of Neil's had given John another step to pride. Dimly he felt that his was the glory of this miracle—for so he regarded his brother's talent—had he not from the very beginning insisted that the boy be given his head? And was he not now justified beyond peradventure? He had created a genius out of his own strength and determination, and his ambition for an excellence beyond others' daring. His world was of his own making. His mother's immunity from material anxiety and hardship, his own position in the Islands, were not these things and many more, had he cared to name them, of his own unaided accomplishment? Surely he had a right to be proud, and more surely, to thank no one but himself. And still his ambitions soared. He would found a family. His was a name to conjure with—Strong! and of it he would weave a great destiny. John Strong's sons should some day carry the fame of the Strongs of Eyre to the uttermost parts of the earth, and he, John Strong, the first of the line, would live always in the legends of his birthplace as the founder of a great family. And he began to dream of a mother for his sons.

Judith Nyte, too, lived an inward life. But hers was a forced inversion, and with a persistent cruelty tore at the vitals of her being . . . Prometheus Bound. And like the hero of mythology, Judith bore her pain heroically. At every home coming of the man she loved, she looked with a new certainty to the fulfillment of her hope. And as often as she hoped was she driven back upon her endurance, her courage, her inner self for support.

John Strong's simple acceptance of her devotion, his simple acceptance of her prowess among her associates, in the games and in the occupations of the fisher girls of the village, the prizes she won in the fish-throwing contests and the admiration and envy she invariably invoked for herself and him, were but knife thrusts to the girl's heart.

He gave freely enough of praise, showed his delight and never failed to encourage, but not once had he so much as hinted that all was not his by Divine right, or that Judith's feats of strength and intelligence were more than her natural endowments which would have bloomed for herself alone had he not been by to gather them. Being by, it was but a matter of course that they should be offered him, and offered, as simply accepted.

But Judith's pain and disappointment were

hidden to her cost. Her natural optimism and sunny temper suffered, and she became, at times, almost morose. She would fly from mood to mood, hysterically gay to profoundly melancholy. But for the most part she managed to hide herself behind her strength.

Of those few who penetrated her veil, one was Tom Rorth. Tom loved her with a passion hardly credible in a man of his simple education and attainments. But Judith would have none of him. And with the congenital cruelty of woman made his burden heavy. This was not deliberate, but neither was it thoughtless. She delighted to exalt her love, and the very likeness of the two big men gave her perfect opportunity. She never failed to take advantage whenever their slumbering rivalry was advertently or inadvertently waked to action. Tom Rorth, the only other man in all the Islands who compared with John Strong in height, in breadth of shoulders, in power of muscle, in beauty of manhood—thus to point John's superiority in each one of these, and of a hundred others, some of which were not so convincing to any but Judith, was her greatest delight.

Tom stood it better than might have been expected. But he resented, inconsistently enough, the one thing which enabled him to hope. John's indifference in the face of his

opportunity made Tom furious. How any man living could look into Judith Nyte's eyes and not instantly and irrevocably fall down and worship her, was more than he could understand—or forgive. And every time he and his rival were pitted and he defeated, the wedge of canker was driven deeper into the suffering man's heart.

The coxswain of the lifeboat was an elective position, the highest honor in the gift of the village electors. And when John Strong was given this post by an almost unanimous vote, and Tom Rorth, who had held it five seasons running, thus superseded, Tom found himself on the brink of despair. He was too fine a character to show resentment of the choice his fellows had made, or indeed to feel it, but the defeat was more than his ego could bear without some deep reaction. And that moment he came to hate John Strong with the power of a good man's hate. This inversion of his reason and instinct was born not of John's superiority nor of any mistaken idea on Tom's part of an injustice, but of the dread self-consciousness of futility and impotence. He realized at last that though he won his love in the end, he could not give her the one man in all the world who was her true mate—because he, Tom Rorth, was second to another.

His difficulty was not lessened but was made more bitter when he was appointed stroke by John, for he could not decently refuse the honor. Tom did not analyze his feelings. He loved and he hated, and that was the beginning and end of it for him.

The initial flash of these seething fires of emotion came on a stormy day in November, the first time the lifeboat went out on duty after John Strong's election to its captaincy. A nor'easter had been blowing up for three days and tide piling up on tide had made heavy seas in the outer bay; too heavy for any small boat to live through. Old Bruno couldn't get ashore and his water containers, huge steel tanks bolted into the rock on which the lighthouse was built, had been under repair and were known to be empty. His supply was in casks, enough for three days only. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to take a fresh supply out to him.

Keeping her head to the seas, which were not greatly embarrassing to the lifeboat, John had worked her up to windward of the light, and was just about to order the paintered casks of water hove overboard to drift back to leeward of the rock when a heavy sea struck the boat on the starboard bow, knocking her off a couple of points. John shouted his command for oars,

at the same moment dropping the steering scull and leaping to give all his strength to Tom's oar. Tom, sulking under the pressure of his intolerable misery, instead of pulling with all his weight as he should have done, tore at John's hands and roared:

"Leave go this oar, God curse you!"

John seemed not to have heard, but with the impulse of the dipped oars, the boat sprang forward to steerage way, and in another ten seconds was head up to the sea again.

The kegs of water were successfully landed for the light keeper and the boat safely brought back to her house. When all was snug, John called the men together, and stepping up to Tom, said quietly:

"Tom Rorth, you'll take bow after this, and Long Jim, you'll take stroke."

There was a silence through which the wind shrieked and moaned about the boat house. Tom made no reply.

"You understand?"

"Yes."

That was all, and next time the boat went out Tom Rorth sat at the bow and Long Jim Fein at the stroke.

Taciturn are these toilers of the sea, these battlers with Nature's most ruthless weapon of destruction. But they are simple, too, and

never learn the incredible distortions to which a dropped word may be submitted when the whole story of an affair is not frankly told. This incident was never mentioned among those nine men, nor to their households, but in the mysterious way such things get about, this story got about, and inevitably distorted. When the tale finally settled to a coherent whole, it stood for what most people can readily understand —a quarrel between two men. Some took the view that John Strong, having superseded his only rival for honors of any kind on the Island, had rubbed it in, as it were, and that Tom Rorth, resenting it, had told John what he thought of him.

Eyre sympathized with Tom, the more that its admiration for John was forced. But these big men gave little heed to their neighbors' sympathy—or censure. Tom Rorth was too busy "fighting for his soul"—his own words. He saw himself clearly enough, looked his problem in the face, and despised himself as he would have despised another in like case. But it is not good for a strong man to despise himself. For this one, it brought upon him disastrously complicated involutions of feeling and the tragedy of his very fineness of character dashing itself to pieces on the rock of its own integrity.

The climax came when one day, after a heavy gale which had held the Island's women in tormented suspense for a full week, the fleet hove in sight homeward bound, and Judith, standing on the point of the headland, made out through the glass that John Strong's schooner was not with them. The terrified girl gripped her sides in an agony of apprehension, raced to the landing and leaped into her boat and climbed aboard Tom Rorth's schooner, the *Petrel,* before she was fast to the moorings.

Tom greeted her with sullen anger which put him in the wrong with his first words.

"What be you come to find here, my girl?" he asked. "Think you I carry John Strong in my crew?"

Judith gave him a face of scorn.

"If John Strong was aboard this boat, Tom Rorth, you it would be in the crew, and John in command!" Then turning to Will Langers, Tom's mate, she said: "Tell me, Will, how was the *Elspeth* headin' when ye last had sight of her?"

"South," Tom answered for his man.

"South?" the girl cried. "That should be the mainland!"

"Aye, the mainland's south, to be sure," Tom agreed, and went on in hearing of Will: "But tell me, girl, what is it to you where John

Strong goes or doesn't go, that ye must make a sight of yerself runnin' out to the fleet afore they be at buoy?"

Judith tossed her head. "I'll tell you nothin', Tom Rorth, save that I'm goin' ashore." And with a flash of her dark eyes, she annihilated the tortured man's last hope. He put a hand on her arm and said through set teeth:

"Let be, girl, ye're makin' a sight of yerself, as I tell you. An' for such a man as John Strong! He cares for naught else on earth save his own conceit. I wouldn't see you makin' a fool of yerself, Judith."

"You be the fool of fools, Tom!" she cried, flushing deep crimson through her tan. "God teach ye sense! If John was by he'd drown ye in yer own well!" And she slid over the schooner's side before the madman could stop her.

He watched her row away and tore his heart with the beauty of her, while his tormented soul lashed him to insanity of fury at everyone and everything on earth—himself most of all.

Now his nights became hideous to him and his days hell. He brooded on his sufferings until, his mind distorted, he sought surcease at any cost. Drink took him, and in his cups he lost all hold. He determined not to leave the girl to be John Strong's plaything. He'd kill

one or the other of them, he cared very little which. Sober, he would try to hold his head up, but as he felt himself sinking, to the bottle he'd go, and work himself into a berserk rage for his self-respect's sake.

The end of this was inevitable. Everyone on the island except the three most involved, saw it afar off and tried in one way or another to ward calamity. But the gods are inexorable.

Meeting Judith and John together in the village one day, Tom's sore heart split in twain, and with a vile epithet to the girl he threw himself upon John and tried with all the power of his coddled hate to kill.

Even at Tom Rorth's best John could have handled him, but in his half drunken, half sick condition he was but a child in his rival's hands. The epithet hurled at Judith had struck John with all the force of a blow in the face. He caught Tom about the middle and had Judith not flung herself into the breach, would have been a murderer in less time than it takes a man to die on the gallows. As it turned out Tom was laid up for some three months, and when he could crawl took passage for Australia in a tramp steamer which had been for the matter of three weeks stormbound in Eyre Bay.

At this news John made no comment, but the Islands seemed suddenly to have shrunk.

Eyre village commented, however, loosed its tongues, indeed, and said its say: John Strong was a bully! and some fine day would surely reap what he had sowed.

There was a meeting at Malcolm's boat house, and a round robin was despatched to John—old David the messenger—demanding his resignation from the council and from command of the lifeboat.

John received the message from old David's hand at the garden gate. He read it, burst into an angry laugh and tore the paper half across, then he smiled, and hatless as he was, strode past David and on down to the boat houses, walked in on the silent assemblage and threw the paper among the shavings on the floor.

"What's the meaning of that?" he asked harshly.

Malcolm sprang toward him and shook his fists.

"Ye strouk a mon as was drappit wi' th' drink, Jahn Strahng, an' we'll no stand by an' avvit ye on th' council no more!"

John waved him aside impatiently.

"Let a man that talks my language do the speakin'." he said. "Come, Harrod, your name's on that thing." He touched the paper with his boot. "What's it?"

"Ye beat up Tom Rorth when he wasn't fit,

John," he said mildly. "'Twas the doin's of a bully."

"Did ye hear the thing he called Judith Nyte?" John asked.

"Ay, we've heard of it," Harrod nodded, and looked to the others. "But Tom wasn't responsible, bein' drunk—as you can't deny, John."

"Responsible?" John laughed shortly. "Do ye accuse me of gettin' him drunk?"

"Well——" Harrod began hesitatingly, but John interrupted him.

"Is there anybody here that says I knew that Tom was drunk?"

No one spoke.

John stooped and picked up the paper and tore it across and scattered the pieces among the shavings.

"Have a little sense," he said scornfully. "There's not a man here that hasn't known me from a child. Let one of ye say John Strong would strike a man that wasn't fit to hit back, an' me knowin' it——"

He waited, but only shuffling feet and half grins answered him. There was not a man in the boat shed but was struck dumb by the obviousness of John's honesty, and without exception they were suddenly aware of their inferiority as they had never been before. They were

humiliated but at the same time their respect for the man before them was of a quality which only generous men can feel, for at heart they were fond of their chairman and outside the village inordinately proud of his reputation.

But this incident, more than anything that had yet happened to him, forced upon John the realization of the constrictions of his world, and the compelling need of wider horizons.

His voyages to the mainland grew ever more frequent and protracted, and when after these trips he came back to the life of his calling, he seemed restless and abstracted. His men found him less interested in surpassing the fleet in catch and speed and maneouvre, but anxious to get to the end of the fishing. Then he would order the schooner's course due south, leave her at the mainland and send her home under Long Jim, with orders to call for him again when the catch was landed. This left him little time at home between voyages, and these days he spent in feverishly getting the schooner ready for her next take out.

"What's come over th' man? Harrod asked Malcolm's boat house. "Might's well be a split herrin' so far's th' village's concerned."

"Thinks hisself too good for us, likely," Swinton said.

"Feelin' his oats, maybe," Kennedy sug-

gested, " 's a young man at that. We was all young once."

"Ay, but we stuck by th' Islands," Harrod said. "If he likes the mainland best let him stay there. He's neglectin' his duties to th' village. An' me—I won't stan' for it much longer."

"Me neither," Garret agreed. "I've always stuck up for John Strong, but th' is a limit. He don't seem to see a man when he stands straight in front of his face, nowadays."

"Lifeboat ain't been out for drill since May."

Jim Fein coming along the beach on his way to Malcolm's was wondering, with somewhat the same irritation of feeling, what had "come over the man." John's visit to the mainland had stretched into five weeks, this time, and Long Jim was not pleased with the prospect of another trip to the grounds without his captain. He'd just come back from his first trip alone, and had brought in, after nearly a month of fishing, the poorest catch made by the *Elspeth* since her rebuilding. He was not proud of his record, nor that he found his men like school boys when "teacher" is away. He could get no work out of them, and Will Langan, in the *Petrel,* had given him a close race home, would have beaten him, in fact, except for a lucky fluke which got the *Elspeth* into the back sweep

of the ebb tide off Wesley's Haven. Will Langan—a mere lad of forty-five, or so while he, Jim Fein, had been going to sea for some six or seven years when Will was born! It was bad enough to be beaten by Tom Rorth, but Tom was an owner captain, while Langan was no more than himself, a mere employee. Well, he wouldn't go alone next take out—the last of the season, likely, here it was October nearly over—let John Strong get another mate if he intended to be an absentee owner!

When he reached Malcolm's and saw the usual crowd of masters and men, apparently in some discussion which had them as solemn as owls, he decided not to stop. He guessed accurately enough what it was they were discussing.

But Kennedy, seeing him about to pass on to the landing-place, called from the open window.

"Hey, Jim!"

"Ay?"

"Come over here, I've somewhat to say to ye."

"Ay?" Jim said, and gripping his pipe between his teeth, went in.

"We was just talkin' 'bout your skipper, Jim," Kennedy began, but Long Jim put up his hand.

"Don't ask me nothin'," he said, "I don't know anythin' about it, an' if I did, I'd only

say John Strong's business be John Strong's business, as ye know well enough yerselves."

"Who's askin' ye anything?" Kennedy said impatiently. "All we want to say to you is, if John wants to stay on th' council, it's decided he's got to attend meetin's."

"An' who does th' decidin'? You, Kennedy?"

"All of us," Kennedy replied, indicating, with a wave of his pipe, the members present.

"Why don't ye send him a round robin?" Long Jim asked, grinning wickedly.

"Ye've no call to git smart, Jim Fein!" Harrod said angrily. "We're tellin' you so's ye can pass it on to John, if ye don't want us tellin' him straight what we thinks of his doin's."

Long Jim shook his head slowly. "Not me, Cap'm Stork. Nothin' 'd suit me better'n to stan' by an' hear ye do it."

"Well, ye'll hear it if ye're by; make no mistake 'bout that!" Harrod retorted.

Long Jim laughed.

" 'Twon't be me that makes no mistake, anyhow," he said. "But if ye take my advice, offered free, mind, ye'll have yer argiments wrote down so's ye won't forget 'em when yer needin' 'em."

"Come now, Jim, yer not standin up for John

leavin' th' council without a chairman, are ye?" Kennedy asked.

"What's it to me what John Strong does, on or off th' council?" Long Jim replied. "He's a bigger man than all of ye put together an' kneaded into one man, 's my opinion, if ye will have it. Me for one, I don't marvel he's sick of the whole lot of ye, with yer pickin's an' yer foolin's over where he is an' what's he doin' when he ain't here or on the Banks."

"Then why don't he git off the council an' give somebody else a chance?" Swinton asked, as though Jim were the culprit.

"Damn yer ol' council," Jim muttered under his breath, then aloud: "An' do ye think ye can do without him?"

"We are doin' without him, ain't we?" Harrod asked, with a nod of finality to the others.

"An' who was it built the stone landin' place, Stork Harrod? You an' Malcolm, when ye were president of council, tried for it, not to mention Cap'm Nyte an' his father before him, for th' better part of forty years. Who got th' Coast Guard Station put over at Wesley's Haven? What about th' new light built last year at Hull Down? An' the' searchlight promised for Eyre Light, so's you an' th' rest of th' lubbers can make yer moorin's in th' dark an' in wet weather? What about the mail boat

stoppin' twice a month, instead of once in two months, like you all had it fixed? How 'bout th' terms for shippin' fletched halibut——?"

"All good work—good work," Kennedy interrupted, "but that's no reason for him to forgit th' place altogether, is it? If we ain't good enough for him, well then, by God, he ain't good enough for us. Ye can tell him I said it, too, me that gave him his first berth an' taught him most of what he knows today about fishin', at that!"

Long Jim laughed aloud.

"Ye sure learned him a deal of knowledge, Cap'm Kennedy, for there's nobody in the Islands—let alone Eyre—that knows th' half of a half what John Strong knows about his trade, nor not you, Cap'm Kennedy, that learned him it all! But maybe ye've forgot some of it?"

If Long Jim's loyal disgust had led him to this defense of his employer in the hope that it might soften his neighbors' resentment against John, he was not a keen psychologist. The discussion took a sharper turn, now, and Long Jim was ignored.

It was decided, finally, that a committee of three, Harrod, Swinton and Kennedy, should wait upon their chairman on his arrival in Eyre, and demand his attendance to duty, or his resignation. A decision of which Parson, who was

consulted, though he was not a member of the board, thoroughly approved. He, too, resented John's growing arrogance; thought him too self-sufficient, too superior to his environment, and that he bore his greatness with a shade too conspicuous an ardor.

Parson gave much thought to this matter and talked often to Judith of his desire to bring John to a realization of his error before he had antagonized the entire community.

"He needs a lesson of some kind that'll teach him sense before it's too late," he said to her one day when the length of John's absence had become not only an annoyance, but a worry.

"No lesson'll teach John what *you* want him to believe, Parson," Judith said. "He's too sure of himself for that."

"Ay," Parson agreed, "*now* he is, but when he finds himself off the council an' somebody in his place in the lifeboat crew—not only that, but him one of the oars, not even stroke, maybe——"

Judith laughed incredulously.

"Ah, but he'll have to take it, Judith," he went on, "that's the rule. An' how'll he think of himself, then?"

"He'll laugh at them, an' wait his time till they come beggin' him to take the scull again," she said confidently. "I know him, Parson, an'

I know them. John knows his worth. An' if they didn't ask him to take it back, John wouldn't care. Like as not he won't stay in Eyre much longer, if it suits him to go to some other place. What's here for a man like John? A man that could be the head anywhere!"

Parson pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"Ay," he said, nodding his head, "ay, ye're right, Judith, but we can't let him do that—go away."

"That's it, Parson." She smiled wistfully, and with a sudden clench of the teeth said: "It's us that needs John, not him that needs us."

"True," Parson thought, Eyre would indeed sustain a loss with John Strong's going.

He sat long that night studying the matter, and found himself convinced of almost the last thing he wished to believe.

" 'Tis a woman's got him," he muttered, over and over, nodding his head with a firmer conviction at each repetition of the words. "Ay, a woman of some sort—nothin' else in th' world but a woman—God grant she be a Christian woman! Poor Judith, if it is so."

But the more he fought his conviction the firmer its roots took hold, as is the way of convictions of this complexion.

None of the resentment of John's neighbors,

not even a rumor of it, reached the headland cottage. No one had any wish to worry Elspeth, and of Neil they thought so little that, to them, he did not enter into the matter at all. Judith and Parson took care not to mention the all-pervading subject except when alone together, and then they talked of little else. But Elspeth caught now and then an averted glance or a hesitant reply, and knew well enough that something was wrong. She did not worry herself, however. So long as she had John and Judith and Neil she had little worry for the village's affairs.

But to Neil the cloud was more definite. He knew very well what was troubling his brother's peers, and understood their annoyance; he'd felt it himself, profoundly indeed, once or twice in his life, but he was scornful of them for daring to resent it actively.

Judith, who understood as clearly as Neil, cared not at all what the village thought or did where John was involved. John could look after himself. But in this breathless pause, while they waited, was an undivined tension for them all. The atmosphere was charged, as it were, like those moments of suspense which sometimes precede a storm; when black clouds hung low above a darkened earth seem charged with evil. Silence, stillness—not sleep, but a kind of lesser death, a negation of life, rather—when anything,

actual danger, even, seems preferable. Intensified, one imagines, to the *N*th power in the listening, the waiting heart of the condemned wretch on the gallows.

The effect of this suspense for Neil was raw nerves—an exaggeration of reaction.

"It's bad," he said to Judith when, retailing some foreboding of Parson's to him, she had laughed.

"Bad?" she questioned. "Ay, bad for Eyre, if John's the man I take him for."

"No," Neil corrected, "bad for John, I mean. You say he'll laugh at them——"

"An' so he will. You'll see."

"Ay, but he'll despise them, too."

Judith shrugged.

"But don't you see, Judith, if he despises his home——"

"His home?"

"Well," Neil went on, "a house isn't home. Home's the place, isn't it? I might be satisfied—mother might, without anybody but each other, but John—he'll not stay in a place he despises, and he'll not take this thing kindly, you may be sure. He'll laugh, yes, but he'll say his say, and when he's done, he'll not have a friend in Eyre, except maybe Parson."

But Judith was unconcerned.

"John can take care of himself, Neil, never

fear. Before a week's gone by, they'll be beggin' him to take hold again, an' in a day he'll have forgot th' whole business."

"Not John. He'll only despise them the more. He'll be off to the mainland again! That's what he'll do."

He turned gloomily to his book of poems and began to read to himself in an undertone.

Judith threw back her head in a characteristic gesture. Neil's last words had gone straight to her heart like the point of a knife. She got up and went out of the house, on down to the landing-place, hunting Long Jim.

CHAPTER VI

On Neil's eighteenth birthday John had presented him with a printing of his poems. A little gray paper board edition with white back, blue lettered. The title John had selected was a greater surprise to the Narcissus-eyed poet than the book. He had long suspected John's intention, given away a hundred times by some clumsily phrased reason for having taken the manuscripts aboard his schooner. But the title —IMPULSES. Where had John found it? And why? To Neil it was perfect, but never in the world would he have thought of it for himself. And the taste of the whole thing! The paper, the printing, the margins, the rough edges, the binding—and the dedication!

> "I have owned service to the deathless dead.
> Grudge not the gold I bear in livery."

a pure mystery to the excited author. John would do nothing but roar his delighted mirth when Neil importuned him for an explanation, and the poet's puzzle grew with time. He sat now, ostensibly mending a net, the book open on the bench before him. The day was warm

and clear, the first of little summer, and Neil read and reread the dedication. Why had John selected it? How could he understand so deeply? Surely he must know more than he let people see, for Neil had never known him show anything but a kind of half puzzled pride in these writings, and there were several the author was convinced his brother couldn't come at at all. But here was understanding such as he doubted himself capable. "I have owned service to the deathless dead!" he murmured. Yes, he did own service. Where else had he found his love and his talent? And "Grudge not the gold I bear in livery!" What a line!

Elspeth, coming in from a trip to the village, found Neil still absorbed, still bending over the little book, still holding the neglected net in one hand while he turned the leaves of his "Impulses" with the other.

"Sakes, child, you'll be sickenin' yerself bendin' double all day like a hoop on a keg! Ye should be out in the day. 'Tis like summer, 'tis so warm and the air as soft as down. Come, get out before the chill of night comes on."

Neil tore his eyes from the words he was studying, words he knew, since he had written them, but words he wondered at. How had he come to write them? Where did such

thoughts come from? And to a fisher lad, who knew no more of the world than was evident to his five senses and could be covered in a day's walking. He repeated the verse as he rose, mumbling the words as though they had but just come to him:

"Through the dun weave of Destiny,
On Time's eternal loom,
Woven and interwoven,
Love's scarlet thread is spun."

He got up from the bench and went to the window.

"I've no wish to go out, mother," he said. "I've my mind on things that like best the indoors today."

Elspeth went to the chimney seat and filled her pipe. She sat drawing in short quick mouthfuls of smoke, and expelling them with a little sharp sound of her lips. She watched Neil for a time silently, then she said:

" 'Twas a rare good sarmin Parson gi' us t' Sabbath morn."

"Aye, mother," he agreed.

"What was t' text, now?" Elspeth asked as though she would recall it.

Neil laughed and turned to her. "Eh, mother," he said, "you have me there. I don't remember it."

"How can ye remember what ye never heard, my son?"

"Hey, mother, don't scold," Neil said, laughing again. "I'll read you a chapter from the Good Book, an' ye say the word."

But she shook her head. "I was wonderin' what it is ye be dreamin' about so, lately lad?"

He looked at her in surprise.

Again she shook her head at him. "I know, son, but 'tis different, lately, day an' night and Sabbath morn, till every worshipper in t' church is laughin' at ye."

"Ah, mother, 'tis not so bad as that! Come now, yer only teasin'?"

"Well," she said, smiling tenderly, " 't is bad enough. I know ye're a dreamer borned, lad, but why, I know not. The ways of God be past findin', but ye're thinkin' of somethin', my son, somethin' new or strange, maybe. Y' ain't thinkin' of leavin' yer old mother, now, lad?"

"Leavin' you? Mother! what put such a notion in your silly head?" he asked, going to her.

She took his hand and put it against her cheek. "Are ye lovin' some girl, my son?"

"Ay," he said, dropping to the seat beside her.

"I knew it. Ye can't deceive yer old mother,

Neil. Out wi' it. Who is it ye're lovin' this strange way so ye can't see a body when they stands straight in front of yer eyes?"

Neil looked at her a little puzzled, then with a glance of mischief: "You want her name?"

"Ay, son."

"Guess."

After a slight pause she said in a tone of transparent apprehension: "Judith?"

Neil jumped up, laughed and, facing the mother, cried: "Mother! Where be your eyes? Judith! Judith! What a tyrant she'd be, for a man!"

Elspeth caught his hand and tried to pull him to the seat beside her again. "Come, lad, tell yer old mother?"

Neil stooped and kissed her cheek.

"Her name is Elspeth Strong, your very own self, and no other, you silly old woman!"

Elspeth pushed him away, her face wrinkling into a pleased smile.

"Neil, ye're a good lad," she said, "ay, a good lad. But ye don't always tell th' truth."

The boy looked suddenly serious.

"No," he said, "it's not Judith, nor anyone else either, that I could name to you, mother. There's not a woman in the world that I've ever seen, I'd care if I never saw her face

again, save only my own mother, and that's the truth for you."

"'Tis not all the truth, then. Will ye no gi' me the rest? What's it troublin' yer heart, son? Or maybe it's yer soul—is it?"

"My soul?" He mused on this. "I'll tell you, mother, but you'll think me a fool—which I am, no doubt."

She stood and put an arm about him.

"We're all that, in one way or another, son. I want to help ye. Ye're sick at heart, I can see that, an' I'd fend it away, whatever it be that hurts ye, if it took my life, Neil. But that ye know, don't ye, son?"

Neil took the hand from his shoulder and kissed it.

"Ah, mother, mother," he said and went again to the window. "I'm afraid no one can help me, dearie; not even you. I don't know what's the matter, myself, except only partly."

He turned, and stood regarding her, but seeing nothing but his idea. Elspeth waited a space, then she said, gently:

"Well, laddie?"

"Life seems all gray—" he spread out his hands, "oh, no color anywhere. Nothing looks worth while. It seems almost silly to go on working so hard just to stay alive."

"But you don't have to work hard, son." Elspeth's tone was of surprise.

"I know," he acknowledged, "I've never had to work hard. John does all the real work—I know . . . that's not what I mean. Everybody else in the village works hard. But—oh, I don't know how to say it—— What's it all for? They're born and—live and laugh and weep and die!" He turned away with a gesture. "What for?"

"There's love, my son," Elspeth said, smiling as at a little boy who longs for the moon.

"Love?" he repeated. "Is there? Do you call what these—these—well, what Judith and Lisal and the boy's in John's crew can feel—do you call that love?"

He was beyond her depth now.

"What do you call love, Neil?" she asked, seating herself in the chimney again and taking up her pipe.

"I don't know," he said, walking back and forth, his head on his chest. "Not what they could understand."

Elspeth smiled to herself at the boy's ingenuousness. "Who can understand love?" she thought. "He's right, though, the village girls and boys couldn't understand Neil. I d
self, his own mother."

"Mother, do you know what she's

woman I could love—the woman I do love." His voice had a note of excitement in it.

Elspeth turned to him, frightened. "The woman ye *do* love, Neil?"

He laughed at her tone of apprehension.

"In my mind, mother. But she's real—real as if she was sittin' there!" He pointed to the seat beside her.

"Tell me, son," she said gently.

Neil spread out his arms in a gesture of impotence. "I couldn't," he said, and went on, speaking slowly, selecting his words: "She's gold, mother, all gold and ivory!" He shut his eyes to see his vision the better and spoke as to himself. "She's young, like the spring is young—and old too, like the spring is old. She's dressed like the spring, in pale colors, and her eyes are blue as the sky above the first faint flush of dawn—in her cheeks. Her lips are red, red as the coral old Bruno brought with him from the south—and her little white teeth—like—snow—shut in a rose!"

He opened his eyes and smiled at her.

"Don't you wish you could see her, mother?"

Elspeth looked at him with open lips, but said nothing.

"Ay, mother," he went on, "I'm lovin' a girl, but I'll never see the girl I'm lovin'." And suddenly he turned to her and threw himself at

her feet. "Ah, mother, mother, be there any such women in the world? I could worship such a one! I could kiss her feet—ay, the very dust her feet had pressed! Surely, I'm fair mad with love and longin'. And is this all?" He jumped to his feet and strode away, twisting his hands together.

"Neil, Neil!" Elspeth cried, following him slowly, "what's this madness ye've got on ye? After all yer brother have done for ye! It's them terrible printed books have drove ye to such a pass."

Neil drew his hand across his eyes, sighed and smiled. "No, 'tis not the printed books, mother. Whatever's this longin', 'twas in me when I was borned. John has it, too."

"John?" Elspeth was incredulous.

"Ay, John. I've seen him look at the girls here, and smile and shake his head. And once he said to me. 'Neil, lad, 'tis a big world. I've a mind to see some of 't.' "

"Is that what keeps him away so long, these voyages, think ye?"

"Ay, I do think it. I'm only afraid maybe he'll never come back, some time."

Elspeth nodded her head. "I wonder."

There was a vague fear for these two, in this habit of John's, which neither of them had thought to put into words before. And now as

they talked its vagueness came to them and checked discussion.

"He's been a good brother to ye, Neil," Elspeth said, after a long silence.

"Too good, maybe," Neil agreed. "I'm not so strong as I might be if John hadn't always made the load so light."

"Where does he get the printed books from? I can't make any kind o' sense from the readin' ye do o' nights, you an' John, when he's home."

Neil laughed. "There's not meant to be sense in them, mother, like in the price of fish, dried or fresh. It's—for the soul, like, such books is wrote."

"For the soul? Nay, what be the use of goin' to such books as them, when ye've got the Good Book for yer soul, my son?"

"More than one book does no harm, silly mother," Neil laughed. "John likes it too. Listen, I was readin' this to him the night before he went away, last:

> 'I am torn with thy beauty,
> O rose of the sharpest thorn!
> O rose of the crimson beauty,
> Why hast thou awakened the sleeper?
> Why hast thou awakened the heart within me,
> O rose of the crimson thorn?'

"And he smiled. 'Ay, lad,' he says, 'she's just like that.' 'Who is?' I asked him. 'The wife

I'm goin' to find some day,' he says. And then he laughs to make me think he's bashin'. But I know better. I tell you, John's got this longin', too."

"Th' Lord forbid!" Elspeth said fervently. "I wish he'd marry Judith. There's maybe girls with more looks in the big world ye're talkin' about, but there's never a finer, splendider woman in all the earth, nor like to be, for a fisherman's wife."

"Ay, she's the great wife for a fisherman, at that," Neil agreed, "and she's as strong as a man, an' can do the work of two, if she's minded to."

" 'Tis not the work she can do, but the strong soul in her handsome body, I'm thinkin' 'bout. A faithful wife she'd be to John, an' the mother o' a fine brood."

The door opened and Judith stepped across the threshold.

Neil laughed. "Speakin' of angels!"

"Well, bookreader?" she threw at him as she set her basket on the table and turned to Elspeth.

"Well, Juno?" Neil answered.

"An' who's Juno, Mister Schoolmaster?"

"A heathen goddess," Neil said seriously.

"Neil! Judith's a Christian woman!" Elspeth cried.

The poet laughed. "No, mother, Judith's no Christian, nor woman, at all. She's a pagan, if ever I saw one. And if she's not a goddess—I never saw one, neither."

Judith put out her tongue at him. "That! for yer heathens an' goddesses an' th' like," she cried, taking him suddenly round the body and swinging him off his feet. "Judith's a woman," she dropped him, nearly sending him flat, "an' Neil's a mouse!" Then to Elspeth, "Long Jim's got word to sail for the mainland!"

"Praise God!" Elspeth ejaculated as Judith kissed her and with a grimace at Neil danced out of the door, leaving it open. "Eh, what a whirlwind!" Elspeth smoothed herself and crossing to the door watched the splendid girl tramp out to the headland and stand peering seaward as though she might even now sight her dream. "How comes it John's so blind?" the old woman murmured to herself, and thought sadly of the girl's youth sacrificed to this blindness of her son's.

But one having the fortune to see Judith at that superb moment would have had no thoughts of lost youth. Boldly modelled throughout, she had an exotic air, as of one come from some remoter planet to play a part on this old earth.

One foot advanced, one hand shading her eyes,

head thrown back, windblown, she might have been twenty—thirty—what matter years? Hers was an ageless soul. And so she looked standing there like the Winged Victory, sublimely unconscious of her surpassing beauty, waving a hand toward the setting sun, crying—"John! my John! my man!"

As Elspeth turned back into the room with a sad little shake of her head, Neil said: "Ye're strong for Judith, mother. Think you she'd have our John if he'd ask her?"

"Ay, son, she loves John as no man should be loved. Have ye no eyes in yer head, Neil? Has John none?"

"I have no eyes for your black-browed Judiths, nor has John, neither," Neil said emphatically.

"More fool th' man!" Elspeth was impatient with man's dullness. "Where'll he find such another? Tell me that, son."

"I don't know, mother, and that's the truth. But John's after something he'll never find, I'm thinking. John's a seeker after the forbidden fruits—'the golden pomegranates of Eden'—and the more forbidden they be the more determined John'll be to have them."

Elspeth considered this for some minutes.

"The forbidden fruits," she mused. "What's it makes you an' yer brother so like in these

wild dreams, Neil, an' so unlike in every other way?"

"I don't know that, either, mother o' mine, but it is so, I do know. He listens to me reading by the hour, and I can see the very soul of longing staring from his sea-blue eyes . . . Some day he'll be gone and never will he come back to us, maybe."

"God forbid!" Elspeth muttered, and turning said with a touch of resentment: " 'Tis them wicked printed books have put such notions in yer two heads!"

Neil smiled mischievously.

"And if he shouldn't come back, some time, couldn't ye do with your poor little Neil only, motherkin?"

"Neil!" Elspeth looked at him but he was looking out of the window and she didn't see the smile on his lips. "Ye shouldn't speak so," she went on. "Ye know I'm a wicked old woman, an' ye're more to me wi' all yer strange soft ways, than John, though he is a better man than you, Neil."

Neil laughed and went to her.

"Ay, mother, you're a wicked old woman to say *that!* But you're right all the same. Maybe I'm a better man than I might have been, for having such a brother, though."

"That ye be, no doubt, my son, an' I'm

ashamed that I said it, what I did, an' more that it's true. If this should turn out the time he never comes back, I'll die of the shame of sayin' such a thing."

Neil put his arm about her shoulder and gave it a hug. "Mother! you foolish old woman. What be you talking like that for? Didn't you hear what Judith said? Long Jim's off to fetch our John, already. He's like to be home by Sunday or Monday at the latest. He'll never leave us, dearie, no matter what else he does. John loves his home."

"I wonder," Elspeth said thoughtfully, and wondered, too, if John had it in him to love, as she and Neil understood the word. He seemed to want nothing—neither love nor gratitude. Admiration, confidence, obedience—yes, but these as his right. He was her son—her first born, of course she loved him, would give her life for him if the need arose. But Neil, now—— Her old eyes blurred suddenly and she felt doubly guilty as a rush of emotion swept over her and showed her the contrast of her feeling.

Judith coming in to sup with them was preoccupied, taciturn, rude. Neil, delighting in subtle raillery which the moody girl couldn't grasp, teased her until she slapped him soundly.

It was his mimicry of her manner of speech which brought punishment on the boy.

"What's wrong wi' ye, Judith, girl?" he asked, with assumed innocence, "can't ye bide a day to wait, that ye're runnin' hither an' back again? What's it now, ye're so quiet about. Have ye a secret trouble all yer own, that ye'll be needin' an ear to spill it into? Here's mine, if ye must speak, but be easy wi' yer language, for I'm no used to rough hearin', like the fisher girls of Eyre, blowin' about the place an' shockin' the good parson, wi' all."

At that she slapped him, and when he made her think he was crying, flew to him and clasped him in her strong arms and begged his forgiveness till he broke from her, and she saw that he was laughing. Then she chased him about the cottage, to the alarm of Elspeth, who could not realize the "baby's" maturity.

Judith slept little that night. There was a something in the air, she knew not what, which held her eyes wide and her heart pounding. And when her strange excitement had reached a point of unbearable stress, she got up and went out into the cool night, hoping to subdue the raging fires of her rebellious passion.

But Nature is an incorrigible driver.

Judith watched Orion mount the zenith and saw a waning moon—symbol of her darkling

hope—sink to a coppery blotch on the rich blackness of the west; heard the shrill clarions of approaching day—the barnyard cocks—sounding the light's invasion, and with dim intuition translating instinctive warning to ringing notes of cheer—translating for the listening girl her heart's warning to a renewal, a rebirth of hope.

And in the following days her excitement grew till she was on edge and could not be still for three minutes at a time. She was everywhere at once, her color high, her words and laughter hither and thither, like frightened swallows in a gale.

The fifth day she spent on the headland, glass in hand, flew from the point to the cottage and back twenty times, and to Elspeth's remonstrance, her ringing laugh, and—"He'll be home today, Elspeth! I feel it here!" her hand over her heart.

Neil and Elspeth avoided each other's eyes, until toward afternoon Judith burst in on them with a cry:

"Elspeth—Elspeth, I've sighted her! Hull down, she is still, but she's standin' in', Elspeth. 'Tis John's schooner, or my name's no Judith Nyte!"

"That's three times in as many days you've sighted her," Neil said, laughing. " 'Tis some tradin' schooner runnin' with the wind, likely."

"It might be John, at that," Elspeth said, without looking up. "But Neil's right, Judith, there's many a sail out there, an' ye say yerself ye can't see——"

"But I can feel!" Judith interrupted impatiently. "Come, Neil, take the glass and tell me if I'm wrong." And out again she flew, running all the way to the point, lips parted, eyes wide, excitement in the very flutter of her petticoats.

Neil looked at his mother, met her eyes, and saw there fear for the girl she dearly loved. Neither spoke, but the poet followed to the point and corroborated the wild girl's surmise. His heart ached for her; he could understand more than her hope—he understood her fear, as well.

At the cottage when he got back to it Neil found Parson come to tell them that the *Elspeth* had been sighted.

"Will ye wait here, or will ye go with me?" Parson was saying as Neil entered.

"John likes best to find mother here when he comes home, Parson, sir," Neil answered for his mother, "but I'll run down to the beach an' give him a hand."

Parson watched Neil out of sight and then turned to Elspeth again. "It's been John's longest voyage, this," he said thoughtfully, " 'twill be good to have him back."

"It be kind in ye to say that, Parson," Elspeth said, nodding her head but keeping her eyes to the window. "John hasn't always heeded the good words ye've given him. I wish ye might prevail wi' John, sir, but I'm sore discouraged."

"Th' Lord will take care of all such matters in His own good time, Elspeth, never fear," he soothed her.

But she shook her head dubiously. " 'Tis a dangerous callin' of John's, th' sea. An' he's a reckless sailor, is John."

"Remember Saul of Tarsus, Elspeth," Parson said, smiling confidently. "Th' Lord knows His business, I'm thinkin'. Such a soul as John's could never be lost, an' we'll keep at him till he's brought safe into th' fold. Well, I'm off to welcome him wi' a blessin.' I'll bring him to you safe. Leave all to God, my daughter."

When the good parson had gone Elspeth busied herself with her preparations for John's homecoming, and in a little while her fears were forgotten, until, an hour or so later, on coming from the kitchen, she saw Neil standing in the doorway, his face blanched and a look of mingled wonder and alarm in his eyes.

"Neil!" she cried, "John——"

"He's there," Neil said in a half whisper.

"Thanks be to God!" Elspeth breathed, but as the boy said nothing more, she asked anxiously: "What's it, lad?"

Neil went close to her and spoke in undertones, as though there might be someone listening. "Before I got to the landin' I saw a crowd gathered, mother, an' I stopped an' watched, an' then I saw John step ashore—an' —an'—he wasn't alone, mother!"

Elspeth stared at him but didn't speak.

"There was a stranger wi' him," Neil went on slowly, unconsciously reverting to his early colloquialisms, "a stranger all covered in a cloak—a—a woman, mother."

"Neil?" Elspeth murmured, incredulous. "A woman?"

"Mother, I feel a heaviness, here," Neil whispered, touching his breast.

Elspeth stared at him. "A woman, ye said, son?"

"Ay, a woman, mother. I couldn't see her face. She was covered in a cloak an' her head covered, too, with all manner of veils an' such."

At this moment John's laugh came to them, and soon they could hear him running along the shell path.

"We mustn't let him see anything but welcome on our faces, mother," Neil said quickly. "He likes little to be questioned. Whatever it is,

he'll tell us——" he broke off and went to the door, stepping back to give passage as John bolted into the room and swept his mother into his arms.

"John!" she cried, smothered in his great embrace.

"Mother!" He held her away from him. "Home again, at last." And turning to Neil he held out a hand. "Well, lad?"

Neil took his brother's hand in both his own. "Ay' John, it's good to have you home again safe and sound."

For the moment Elspeth forgot everything save that she was held in John's arms. "Ay," she repeated, "Neil was sayin' t'other day how ye might never come back to us."

John laughed. "Neil's a fool, mother, an' he knows it. This time I've come home for good."

"For good?"

"To stay. Ay, 'east, west, hame's best'. But I've not come alone." He paused and, looking from one to the other of the staring two, said with a sly smile, "I've brought ye a daughter, mother. An' to you, Neil, a sister."

Elspeth tried in vain to take this in, but she could only repeat: "A daughter?"

Neil cried, "A sister? John!"

John laughed. The surprise was all he had

looked for. Then, taking his mother in his arms again, he said: "Ay, an' a wife to meself."

"But where is she, John?" Neil asked as though he didn't know.

"She's waitin' for me to fetch her to her new home," John answered. "Come, mother, bestir, bestir, they'll all be here any minute. Ye mustn't be behindhand wi' yer welcome."

"Oh, John—John!" Elspeth cried, distress in her voice, "how could ye, wi'out a word to yer own mother?"

John stared at her a short moment, then very tenderly he said: "Ah, mother, ye've a right to be angry wi' me, but ye'll bless yer son a thousand times over, when ye lay eyes on th' flower he's brought ye." He turned with a sudden enthusiasm to Neil: "An' you, Neil, I told ye I'd find her, an' I did." He reached out and caught the bewildered poet by the shoulder. "I've been to th' moon, boy, an' brought back its queen!"

Elspeth, released from her son's embrace, took refuge for her shock and hurt—the hurt for Judith more than for herself—in movement. "Come, Neil," she said, "get th' big bowl, an' th' bottles, all of 'em."

John gave Neil a shake and laughed happily. "Bestir, boy," he said, "an' stop yer starin'.

Save that till ye've seen her, for ye'll never leave off then."

Neil smiled and started to follow his mother, but he found himself rooted to the boards on which he stood, as the sound of someone running came to his ears, and he knew that it was Judith.

In a moment she stood on the threshold . . . not Eve, now, but a heathen goddess—Juno—as Neil had called her. She was breathing strained, hoarse breaths as though she had run from the ends of the world. She pressed the door jamb with her left hand and stood still while she held her right toward John. Speechless, she threw back her head to ease her breathing, her dusky hair tumbling about her shoulders in a mass of darkness like the veritable thundercloud from which great Jove would in a moment hurl his lightnings. Her wide eyes smoldered flame and her brows were drawn together in a menacing frown.

John stared at her as though he had never seen her before and he would make out who she might be who thus broke upon his homecoming with wrath and threat? And long afterward it came to him that indeed he saw Judith for the first time this day, though he had looked at her a thousand times and more, since boyhood.

"Where's yer manners, girl?" he asked

sternly, as he felt his mother's hand on his arm, and thought her frightened.

In a voice hoarse and sudden as if forced from her by a blow, Judith said: "Is it true, John?"

"Is what true?" he asked mystified.

"That ye're wed?"

"Ay, it's true. An' why be you here? Go an' welcome the newcomer like the rest, Judith, or ye'll be no friend at this cottage."

Judith let go the door jamb, came forward a step and with a sweeping gesture pointed behind her. "An' is it that little wisp of fearsome straw-hair, down to th' beach?"

John looked at his mother, his bewilderment complete. "Ay, she's gold——" he began.

"Gold? Gold?" she cried, "that mite of a child? That wee babe, that Judith could toss into th' sea wi' a twist of one of her hands—that to be the wife of John Strong?"

Elspeth drew back in alarm as the tragic girl advanced toward John, her hands held out to him in quivering supplication, while her eyes tore him limb from limb.

John glared at her in dumb amazement, not for the thousandth part of an instant comprehending the tragedy of her surprise.

"Is the girl clean daft?" he asked the silent room.

Elspeth stepped up to her and touched her arm.

"Judith!"

But Judith shook her off. "Daft?" She laughed in her throat. "Ay, daft! Oh, ye fool wooden-head of a man! Ye blind fool!" For an instant more she stood quivering, then with a superb gesture she lifted her hands palms upward, as though releasing her winged passion, and turning her back upon the man, went out into the dusk.

While John stared after her in pained silence and wonder, and Elspeth rocked herself to and fro moaning as though she were in actual pain, Neil shook in a very ague of excitement. He was the only one of the three whose mind in any degree understood the drama or could appreciate the incredible beauty of the scene they had but just witnessed. Covering his wet eyes for a moment to shut in the picture, he stumbled from the room.

As Judith's figure disappeared around the bend in the road which led to the village, John turned his eyes upon his mother.

"For the love of heaven!" he said, under his breath, " 'tis a dream—or is the girl daft, for sure?"

"Ay, son," Elspeth nodded, "Judith's daft—daft wi' love o' you, John——"

"Mother!" the big man protested, "with love of *me*?"

"Eh, son, wi' love of you."

"Mother, it's you are daft! What——"

"Son," she interrupted him, "there's not a girl in the village as wouldn't gi' her soul to be th' wife of John Strong, an' any but you'd have seed it long ago!"

"Mother, mother," he cried in real distress, "don't say such things to a man—an' Judith of them all!"

"What's made ye so blind, John?"

"Blind?" He laughed as a sudden feeling of his strength came over him, and with it a wave of confidence. "I'm not blind. Blind? Wait till ye see! But I don't care a penny for any woman in all the world save the daughter I've brought home to ye. I've fought for her, tooth an' nail; never a stone have I left unturned to get her, an' there's been nights an' days without sleep or peace for me till she said me yes. An'——"

"Sorry's the day for Judith, I'm thinkin'," Elspeth broke in. But John paid no heed to her.

"An' now ye tell me every girl in th' village is daft to have me." He smiled as at an absurdity. "I don't believe it, mother, but if ye're right they can all have their senses back

now, for the wife of John Strong is as far above the best of them——"

"John!" Elspeth interrupted him resentfully, "there's not a finer girl in all the earth than Judith Nyte, an' ye're the fool of fools not to have seed it long since."

John banged his fist on the table. "Mother, my bride is a white angel from heaven! Judith? I tell ye when ye see Lysette ye'll want to go down on yer knees an' pray."

"Lysette?" Elspeth's tone was scorn. "An' what kind of a name is that?"

John looked at her for a moment in amazed silence, then he said quietly: "I don't know. 'Tis her name, an' 'tis a sacred name to John Strong, an' to all as loves him."

Elspeth put her face against his coat and cried silently.

"Dearie, dearie," John murmured, patting her shoulder and smiling down upon the white head.

Neil, coming in from the kitchen carrying the big copper bowl used on all festal occasions, looked at them startled. John smiled at him reassuringly and, putting his mother away from him, holding her at arm's length, said heartily: "I must be gone an' fetch my bride to her new home. Make ready, mother. Ye'll forgive yer John a thousand times when ye see th' star

flower he's brought ye." He hesitated a moment, then, with a laugh, strode to the door and went out.

Elspeth wiped her eyes, made a gesture of helpless pain and smiled wanly at Neil.

"Didn't I tell you John would have none of these village girls?" he said.

Elspeth shook her head dolefully. "Do ye think he's found some girl we can abide, son?" she asked, and not waiting a reply, murmured: "Sorry's the day——"

"Hush, mother!" Neil warned in a whisper.

Elspeth turned at the sound of a step, and as she did so, Judith came into the house.

"Judith!" Elspeth cried, her voice tender with sympathy.

But the wild girl was too absorbed in her anguish to know or care for tenderness. Utterly oblivious to all save pain, beside herself with the shock of her disappointment, a magnificent rebellion shook her. Beating her breasts and throwing out her arms in splendid free gestures, like the branches of some great storm-tossed tree, she strode the room and poured out her agony in a confused flood of words that swirled and dashed upon the sensitive hearts of her hearers, holding them silent, spellbound.

"Wait," she cried, in a voice of ringing orn, "wait till ye see the thing of straw he's

brought home to ye! A thing of straw an' tears—a wife for John Strong—that? An' who's to bear John stalwart sons, think you? Pale an' pink an' fragile like a flower of springtime, an' as quick to fade an' wither—nay, an' she bear him childs at all, 'twill be a wonder. Nor ever a son or daughter for winter weather an' storm will that frail thing bring forth."

"Judith!" Elspeth cried, and covered her face.

Neil stepped toward her, but Judith had forgotten them. She caught her hands behind her neck and strained her taut muscles. "Was Judith born to die a sterile maid?" she asked herself, "Judith that's laughed in th' freezing wind to feel th' hot blood burn her heart at thought of John—this hot blood that all the icy blasts of winter storm an' sea can never cool——"

Stopping suddenly her wild stride, in an excess of fury she shook her hands toward the silent pair before her.

"Have we not been mated since childhood? John and Judith? Wasn't it John himself that taught me to swim and handle a boat as good as a man? Who was it for I won the silver medal each year these ten years past? 'Tis he that taught me, 'tis his smile an' word has been my prize. Did any think 'twas the coin of silver

Judith loved an' fought for? No—no, nor did John think it!"

With a swirl she turned to Elspeth and in a voice of despair, whispered: "Elspeth, Elspeth, is life a thing like this for Judith?"

Neil's quick ear caught the sound of approaching voices and laughter. He cried out to Judith, took her by the arm and shook her. She looked at him, dazed, then, catching the sounds herself, with a gesture of weariness she stepped behind the door and began to pull herself together. Before the bridal party had reached the cottage her hair was arranged and her disordered garments smoothed out to a semblance of tidiness, and cold water had washed away some of the traces of her abandoned grief. Not tears—for Judith had yet to shed these.

She took a position in the shadows of the long room and would not budge from her seclusion throughout the ceremony of welcome.

Elspeth and Neil stood either side of the doorway to greet the bride, but as she appeared to their view neither moved nor spoke.

John waited patiently for his mother's words of welcome. But Elspeth was dumb with fear. She saw through blurred vision a girl barely out of her childhood, "pale and pink and fragile as a flower of springtime," large eyes rounded

with apprehension, and small hands clinging to the big man at her side.

The veils were still about her head, but drawn aside, revealing the flower-like face, and her cloak was thrown back showing her gowned in soft white stuffs over pale green.

John looked to Neil to break the awkward silence and what he saw brought his hearty laugh, for the poet was staring with open-mouthed wonder. No fear was in his gaze, but amazement and awe . . . he was looking straight into the eyes of his own creation, the woman that but a few short days ago he had so inadequately described to his mother, when she had enquired the reason for his abstraction and sadness.

Lysette was hardly more than a child in appearance, though past her twenty-first year, of medium height, slender as a reed and as fragile looking, hair pale gold and eyes soft violet. Across her white skin seemed to blow gusts of faint color like zephyrs on the surface of a pool, and between her parted lips shone "little white teeth like snow shut in a rose."

John's laugh broke the spell that held his mother and brother silent, and with a quick movement, bird-like in its suddenness, the pale bride stepped toward the poet. But Elspeth moved between them, took the girl's hands in

hers and began to speak in low trembling tones.

"Welcome, my daughter, welcome to thy man's home. May you be happy here as you bring happiness to him. An' in th' fullness of time, may ye be the mother of strong sons. An' may you an' yer man live many a joyful day in th' love and fear of God."

"Amen!"

Elspeth turned the girl to Neil. He took her little hands, and in a low voice, and haltingly, gave her greeting.

"Welcome, my sister. May your man's brother, and now yours, serve you and him in faith and love. And may God deal with me even as I deal with thee."

"Amen!" again came John's hearty voice, with the suggestion of a laugh behind it.

"Fool!"

John turned angrily in the direction from which this word was murmured, and saw Judith in the shadow.

"Be silent!" he said sternly, then taking Lysette's hands from Neil's, "Welcome to my home, Lysette, an' now yours. May ye be as happy here as yer husband has been. More I cannot ask for ye. An' may your God do so to me an' more also, if I fail ye in any need."

As John leaned down and kissed his bride either cheek, the room seemed to the be-

wildered girl to suddenly fill with faces—strange faces, dark and ominous. But the men and women and children who crowded into the room were solemn, not menacing. They were abashed by this pale newcomer, who seemed so different from themselves.

John, sensing their embarrassment, laughed and welcomed them. "Give us some punch, mother," he said heartily, "an' we'll drink a health."

"Will ye no ask a blessin' first, Parson?" Elspeth said to the minister as he came to her.

Parson turned to John.

"Is it the will of the master of the house?"

"Ay, Parson," John laughed, "we'll have no controversy this day. Ask a dozen an' ye like, but make 'em short, for we're waitin' to drink a health to John Strong's bride."

"I'll ask a blessin' on no man's house that takes God's authority an' power in a spirit of levity, John Strong."

John shrugged his heavy shoulders. "Very well," he said, " 'tis you that refuses, not I, so we'll have to do without. Come, mother."

Lysette gave a little gasp. "John!" she said tremulously, then to Parson: "It is my wish, sir. You cannot refuse service to me."

For a long moment there was silence. It seemed to Neil as though a bird had piped in the

midst of thunder and silenced it. Then Parson smiled and raised his hands.

"May the blessing of God be upon this house and upon those that dwell therein. An' especially, O Lord, may the master of this house be brought to the knowledge of Thy might an' power through Thy infinite mercy, nor yet by Thy flaming wrath!"

"Amen!"

In the ensuing moments while the company filled their glasses and the cakes were passed about, the bride was somewhat forgotten by all except Neil. John was host and felt himself responsible to his guests. But the poet's gentle smile and reassuring words, whispered as he went back and forth with the plates of cookies, spiced cakes, and the like, found the first response in the girl's lonely homesick heart. She turned to him as to one of her own.

John's voice came to her now and then, as he laughed and joked with one or another of his friends, and she found herself beginning to wonder at the brothers' difference. Wonder if they were as different as they seemed—as indeed they were, outwardly. Neil was just her own height, and nearly as slender, and, when he stood beside John, looked much smaller than he was. Suddenly she caught Judith's eyes upon her. Neil was passing at the moment and

Lysette grasped his arm, making him spill the punch he was carrying.

"Please," she whispered.

He stopped and, laughing at the mishap, instinctively stood between her and the glowering eyes in the shadows. But before Lysette could say more, John's voice broke upon them. He was speaking to Parson.

"So ye're as determined as ever to catch me in your net, eh, Parson?"

"I am that," Parson answered, and taking him by the arm, he raised his glass. "A health to ye, John Strong! An' a health to you, Lysette Strong! Happiness an' long life to ye both!"

Lysette acknowledged the compliment with a frightened little courtsey as the company repeated the parson's words and drank their punch.

John came to her and put an arm about her.

"I thank you, Parson, an' all of you," he said, "an' I'm sure as soon as the strangeness passes, ye'll all welcome my bride with yer hearts as ye welcome her now with yer lips."

"Ay, that we will, John," Parson answered for them all, "that we will."

Harrod went up to John and held out his hand.

"Welcome home, John. God give ye a long

life with us. Maybe ye'll be stayin' round Eyre more, now, eh?"

John smiled. "I'm done with the mainland, Cap'm Stork," and, indicating his bride with a glance, "since I've brought away the reason for goin' there."

Malcolm and Kennedy followed Harrod's lead and welcomed their chairman home. There would be no need, now, to carry out those exceedingly embarrassing instructions of the council's, and this relief gave a warmth to their welcome which they were far from actually feeling, for they'd found a new cause for resentment in John's manner of finding and marrying his wife. They had gone to the landing-place to deliver their ultimatum to him before he should have had time to hear of their intention from someone friendly to his ambitions and superiorities, and had, themselves, been bowled over by the advent of the bride and John's hearty invitation to them and to all those who had followed to see and hear John when he received the council's decision.

John took the unusual assemblage on the beach as a tribute; thanked them all for their reception, gave the bride in Parson's charge and ran on ahead to tell his mother and brother of her arrival.

The more they thought this over the more

they resented it, but they were helpless in the circumstances, and, not knowing what to do, did nothing.

On the way home, Malcolm suddenly stopped and, slapping his leg, roared with laughter.

"Th' mon's th' de'el himzel'!" he shouted, "Gud 'elp un, but 'e'll skin outen hell, if 'e ever gits stouk wi' th' prongs o' Zatan's pitchvork!"

Harrod and Kennedy joined in the laugh on themselves and felt suddenly as though they'd been relieved of an onerous debt.

CHAPTER VII

Darkness had fallen by the time the last guest had departed. Then John turned to make his bride and Judith take hands in friendship, but he found the room empty. He took Lysette in his arms.

"That's done," he said, with a sigh of relief. "They be good neighbors, all of them, but this fuss an' pother has tired you, my sweet?"

"It's all so strange." Lysette looked about the room, at the nets and other evidences of her husband's vocation. "I like it better when we are alone," she finished shyly.

He laughed. "Ay, so do I," he said, kissing her, and whispered: "Just you an' me, my own! The dream's come true at last. You here under my own roof. I thought it would never be, Lysette, ye made me work so for every smile ye gave me, an' with everybody tryin' to keep me from you!"

"Poor father," she said, a little catch in her voice, "I wonder how he'll do without me?"

"He'll do," John laughed, "never worry yer little head now, my doveling, we two are going to be happy here, an' let the world go hang, eh?"

He laughed again and covered her face with kisses.

Lysette put her hands against his chest and pushed herself away from him. He let her go, his face clouding in disappointment.

"Didn't ye promise to leave all that coldness so soon as I got ye home?" he asked. " 'Tis that promise I've lived on these weeks of waitin', an' it's been bitter hard to wait, Lysette."

He reached out his hands and took her arms, drew her close and tried to make her look at him. But she only hid her face in her hands, and murmured protestingly:

"John!"

Neil came into the room from outside. John heard his step. "There's naught to fear, my doveling," he said gently, "ye're as safe here as ever ye were under yer own roof."

She uncovered her face, reassured by his tone. "I'm not afraid," she began, then, with a little shudder: "That black-browed woman who was here—why did she look at me as if she hated me?"

John looked at her puzzled.

"She's meanin' Judith," Neil said.

"Judith?" John laughed at the idea of Judith hating anyone of his household. "Judith's the salt of the earth," he said, "she's not an

ill thought in her head for no one, has she, Neil?"

"No," Neil shook his head and smiled.

"Now, boy, what of yer poetry?" John said, indicating the delicate bride. "Didn't I tell ye?"

"Ay, John, you've done what you said. But 'tis nothing new, that; you've always had your way."

"You remember the verses ye read to me the night before I went away last?"

"'O, Rose of the crimson beauty!'" Neil quoted.

"Aye, 'Rose of the sharpest thorn.'" John turned to Lysette. "See, my doveling, how we talked of you, Neil and I?"

"Of me?" Lysette was incredulous.

"Neil never knew it was of you we talked. He thought I'd yet to find you, but it was you all the time."

"I knew there was something in the wind, though," Neil insisted, "for our John was all adream more than half the time." He laughed and quoted the whole verse:

"'I am torn with thy beauty,
O Rose of the sharpest thorn.
O Rose of the crimson beauty,
Why hast thou awakened the sleeper—
Why hast thou awakened the heart within me,
O Rose of the crimson thorn?'

When he heard that, he said you were just like it—only he didn't tell me who."

"And did you believe him?" Lysette asked.

"I though it his dreaming," Neil said, "I thought there was no such woman in all the world——" he stopped, embarrassed by the implication in his words.

"There's but one only, lad," John said proudly, "but had she been hid in the caves of the Pluto himself, John'd have found her an' brought her out." He laughed at Lysette's flushed cheeks, lifted her off her feet and kissed her. "There now," he said as he put her down again, "you be tired. Come an' see the room that'll be yer own, where not even I can enter it without ye give me leave."

When they were gone Neil stood looking about the long room for several minutes, then muttered: "I'd better be helpin' mother; Judith'll not be here tonight, I'm thinkin'." But he did not move for several minutes, and then only to take the little volume of Pound's "Exaltations" from the shelf, and turn to the poem he had just quoted.

"'O Rose of the crimson beauty——' No!" he thought, "she's not that—here! 'The unappeasable loveliness is calling to me out of the wind . . . .

Pale hair that the moon has shaken
Down over the dark breast of the sea,
O magic her beauty has shaken
About the heart of me;
Out of you have I woven a dream
That shall walk in the lonely vale
Betwixt the high hill and the low hill
Until the pale stream
Of the souls of men quench and grow still.'"

He shut his eyes and improvised, murmuring the words under his breath:

"Cometh the Rainbow One!
Seraphim, thy lute strings—smite, O smite!
Cherubim, thine anthems—sing, O sing
Archangels, spread thine opal'd pinions—
Wing on wing!
Lest ye be lost—lest ye be lost in light!"

He knew himself a man born blind, and seeing for the first time. Light, color, form—he had dreamed these, now he saw them. And the difference was a vividness as bewildering as imagination can conceive.

"Look trouble in the face, lest it follow you behind," is a favorite adage of the Islands; coined, it is said, more than a century since, by the women of that time, when, after the greatest storm in the Islands' history, forty new widows knelt in the little red church of Eyre and murmured "Amen" to their Parson's "The Lord

gave, the Lord taketh away—blessed be the name of the Lord."

It was Judith's way. In the years she had longed, and suffered disappointment, she had visioned no compromise; only one hope had discovered its way to her heart—the hope of wifehood. As to motherhood, she took that for granted. The one was the other to her mind. But now she was conquered. And with elemental simplicity she surrendered. Life for her was over. Life, as she had understood the word up to that moment when, standing on the beach to welcome him, she had seen John Strong step ashore with the "other woman's" hand in his.

But suffering was not over for her: she had now despair, which is worse than torment though easier to bear, as death is easier than life—provided it *is* death. But then, despair is death of the spirit, while all the rest of us lives.

Next morning Judith bore to the headland cottage a bundle of immaculate linen. Sheets, towels, table covers, curtains, napkins, and what not of the kind.

As she entered the cottage John was the only occupant of the room. Looking him in the eyes, she said: "John, I've brought ye some bride things for yer woman. Some day I knew ye'd

be weddin' a wife, an' I made these things against her comin'."

Instantly his mother's words of yesterday were refuted to John's belief. He forgot, for the time, Judith's queer behavior, and seized upon this simple proof of her kindly feeling for him and his.

He took the bundle from Judith's arms, and called: "Lysette!" Then to Judith he said: "I'll not thank ye, Judith. There be no need of thanks between us. But I'll say it's like you."

As Lysette came into the room Judith turned with a visible effort to meet her eyes. The pale girl stopped when she saw the visitor. But Judith smiled and John said: "Lysette, Judith has brought ye a weddin' gift. Look!" He held the bundle toward her. She stepped quickly to him and took it from his hands. "Oh!" she cried, as, unable to bear its weight, it slipped from her arms to the floor. "Oh, I—I——"

John laughed and, stooping, picked up the bundle. With a sweep, he cleared a place on the table, opened and spread the things out, and they saw the embroidered letters "J. S." enclosed in wreaths and flowers. Lysette looked at John as though for instruction how to meet the situation. But Judith spoke.

"I could not know her name till she was

come," she said, "so I had only your own to go by for the letters, John."

By this Elspeth and Neil had come into the room.

"A weddin' present from Judith, mother," John said, with significant emphasis, "made against my bride's homecomin' this long time, she says."

Elspeth examined the linen, gave a sudden glance toward Judith and then went to her, but said nothing. Judith made her simple explanation of the letters again.

When Judith had gone, John said to Lysette: "Ye gave her no word of thanks, my pigeon. Why?"

"These were not made for me, John, but for you."

"One an' the same thing now, birdling," John laughed, pinching her cheek. "Ye see how silly ye were, mother? Judith had no thought in her head like ye'd have me believe."

Neil's tact flew into the breach. "Who'd think," he said, picking up one of the napkins and examining it, "that Judith's great fingers could weave such daintiness?"

But Elspeth's mind was too literal, too simple to think of covering her son's unwisdom, and her resentment was not yet laid. She said: "Ye're a fool, my son," and left the room.

When John turned again to Lysette he saw tears glistening on her lashes. He thought her troubled at his mother's epithet, and took her in his arms, laughing gently.

"Ye mustn't mind our rough ways, Lysette. Mother means nothin' by such talk. Women—they're obstinate creatures, for sure. A notion once in their little heads an' a gale of wind'll never blow it out. Mother thinks all the girls in th' Island are mad with love for your John, an' when I say different, she calls me a fool!" He lifted her off her feet and held her at arm's length, laughing at her ineffectual efforts to free herself, then setting her lightly on his shoulder he capered about the room, to the accompaniment of her squeals of fright. When he put her down her hair was loosed and fell about her slight body in a showering mass of pale gold. The color in her cheeks came and went with her panting breath and she broke from him and ran to Neil, clinging to him and breathlessly crying for help.

Neil, almost as frightened for Lysette as she was for herself, laughed nervously while John held her aloft, but when she was once more on safe ground his heart beat more tranquilly until she clasped him, her loosed hair shrouding him in a golden mist of shimmering light and perfume. Then his heart leapt and seemed to be

still, utterly. Darkness smote him and as he felt himself going down he caught instinctively to save himself and dragged Lysette with him to the floor. John sprang toward them, but Neil was on his feet instantly and helping Lysette to hers.

"Lysette!" John teased, "ye mustn't be so rough in yer ways, girl. Neil's no used to such handlin'. He's but a delicate lad, an' ye'll have to be gentle with him."

But Lysette was concerned. "What is it, Neil?" she asked quietly.

"Nothing," he replied, smiling at her, "'twas the suddenness of it. I'd no time to get my balance, that's all."

This encounter did more to sweep away the shyness Neil had felt in the presence of his brother's bride than weeks of ordinary intercourse might have done. For Lysette, it gave her a feeling of sudden intimacy with this weak boy who, like herself, was different from these others. And when later John left them alone together while he went about his business and duties, the two found the level of a common language, and Neil discovered the source of John's taste in bindings and titles and dedications for books of poetry. Lysette knew many of his poems by heart and quoted her favorites

to him—and from poets of whom he had never heard.

"My father is a bookseller," she said when he exclaimed with wonder at her knowledge of books. "It was him John used to consult about the poetry and other books for you. And often my father would call me down into the shop to help with advice. It was thus we met, John and I."

"You've known him all that time?" Neil asked in amazement.

"It's more than three years, now, since we met, first; the day after I came home from the convent school. I was only seventeen then and I'd never seen a man like him. So tall and broad and strong. I thought he was a king—or something like that." She laughed shyly, turning from the mirror where she'd been arranging her hair. "My father laughed at me and called me a romantic little fool. 'He's only a lout of a fisherman,' he told me. But I knew better. I *knew* he was something more than that." She looked about the typical room, at its smoke-stained rafters and the hundred and one evidences of the occupation of its owner.

"But John's no ordinary man," Neil said proudly. "There's none like him in all the world, I'm sure."

Lysette smiled at the tone of pride and

touched the poet's arm timidly. "Of course, I know that," she said, then as if she'd been thinking of something else, "No one of you ever questions him, or denies him anything, do you?"

This came as a new thought to Neil. He looked at her in surprise. "It's his power," he said simply.

"It's the same here in his home as it was on the schooner—he's master everywhere."

Neil had nothing for this except what he had already said.

"Yes," she mused, "he's strong, like his name."

She turned away, her face sobering, and crossed to the door, where she stood looking out to sea. Neil watched her intently for a moment or two and saw her shudder slightly.

"What is it?" he asked, going to her.

"I—I'm afraid," she said.

He smiled. "Of what?"

She turned to him impulsively. "It's—it's all so—so different! Everything—so cold, so hard. The sea is all gray, and the ground is bare and brown. Aren't there any flowers or birds or any sunshine here, at all?"

"It's comin' winter," he said on a note of apology; "but in the spring—you'll see the green comin' into life." He pointed south. "There's

no lovelier point on all the coast. The wind's east today, but tomorrow 'twill turn an' 'twill be clear, likely. In the summer those cliffs 'll be gay with flowers, an' the birds in the garden here, will wake you every morning with their songs."

Lysette looked at him with a puzzled little frown. "How is it you're so different?—And care for things like that?"

He turned away from her, and when he spoke his tone was wistful. "I'm only Neil. No one pays much attention to me. There's little I can do that counts. I must care for something. If I were John—" He broke off and stood silent, checking his thoughts with more difficulty than his words.

"Your people—" Lysette said hesitatingly, "they love him, don't they? They met him at the landing as though he were a conquerer come home from war."

"Yes," Neil said thoughtfully, "since Tom Rorth went away there's no one——"

But Lysette wasn't listening. She went on as though to herself. "And on his boat he *was* like a king. No one of the men was bold enough to question him."

Neil smiled at the bare idea. "They wouldn't question twice!" he laughed.

"No, they wouldn't dare." Covering her eyes,

she said querulously: "Oh, tell me again that it's not always like this! That spring ever dares to come here, and the sky is sometimes blue—I—I can't believe it."

Neil laughed again, at her earnest tone. "Some day I'll show you the buds swellin' on the trees, and then, a week or so later, from here all the way to the cliffs out there 'twill be white with blossoms, and all along the edge here 'll be blue with young violets. And tomorrow when it clears the sea will be like a silver shield, and from the top of the hill yonder you can see the farm lands and cottages and five little sleepy villages dozin' in the sun."

"I thought the sea was everywhere," she said, laughing shyly.

"It frightened you, didn't it?" He smiled. " 'Tis so fierce and wild. I'm afraid of it too when the wind's east. And you—you belong out there as little as the flowers do—that need the shelter of the hills and the warm sunshine to make them bloom. Look! The sun's comin' out for a minute, between those two black clouds." He held out his hand to her as he stepped from the door. "Come, let me show you from the hill top, how the whole world is waitin' for the spring? . . . Won't you come with me?"

She hesitated a moment, then like a timid child she put her hand in his. "Yes, I'll come."

such strings to the Gospels—walkin' on the water, an' raisin' the dead, an' multiplying fishes, an' such foolishness. Many a man would have seen the sense an' goodness in the book, if it had been but plain talk. I can't understand men like them, men as followed the sea, makin' up such tales. Poetry it is, Parson, naught else from start to finish, an' fit only for such men as Neil——" He picked up a Bible which lay on the table by his hand, and opened to Genesis. "Listen to this," he said, smiling with amusement, and read a few verses aloud, then closing the book with a bang, he laughed out. "Ye see, sir, I've read Darwin's books."

Parson smiled responsively. "An' do ye think I haven't John?"

"Well, if ye have, can ye explain the contradictions in the two, then?"

Parson shook his head as at a wayward child.

"Ye've read of the amoeba, John—the lowest form of life known to man. 'Tis but a bit of slime, like a tiny piece of a jelly fish. Well, when that bit of slime reaches to a precise stage of its life, it separates into two pieces, and one complete creature becomes *two* complete creatures—male an' female. There's yer Adam an' Eve, stripped of its poetry, if ye wish it so. But what matters such things, John? Doesn't it take a Creator to make one form of life as much

as ever to make another form? How came the sun, moon an' stars into being? Created themselves, think ye?"

John mused a moment or two before he answered. He was plainly impressed. Facts were impressive things to his mind. "Well," he said, finally, taking up the Bible again and turning to the last pages, "well, Parson, if ye can explain the first part so easy, maybe ye can explain the last, as well." He opened at random and read a few verses of Revelations. "Now, Parson, who's this 'woman clothed with the sun and under her feet the moon and on her head a crown of twelve stars'?"

"The mother of God, John," Parson answered promptly, "with the twelve tribes of Israel in her crown. An' the great red dragon—do ye know that in those days it was unlawful to speak ill of Rome? Well, 'twas, 'an' the penalty was death. Saint John wrote of her in metaphor, therefore, an' the dragon with seven heads an' seven crowns upon his heads was none other than Rome set upon her seven hills. An' if ye'll go a little further in the next chapter, ye'll see how it describes the way Rome governed by fear an' by might of arms, an' warred upon the followers of Christ. An' how no man might trade save only he was first a Roman. The rest of the world was but slaves in the

eyes of the Romans of those days. Ye know little of history, my son. But these things are of no account if ye haven't the *will* to believe, John."

"Ah!" John laughed shortly. "That's it, Parson. The will to believe. Ye may believe what ye like if ye have but the will to believe it. But the truth takes no account of will or no will, I'm thinkin'."

Parson sighed. "John," he said wearily, "ye're blind. Wilful blind. But ye'll never be brought round wi' argument, no man ever is. 'Tis faith ye must have—faith in the word of God."

"Faith without reason? That's for women, not for a strong man, Parson. Faith! What need have I for it? I see no good goin' snivelin' to a miracle worker to do my work for me. I ask no help from no one. What I can't get for myself I can do without."

"It's easy for a man to say that, John, when he has all his heart's desires."

"I have only what I've earned with hard work an' honest dealin'. What more can ye ask of me?"

"God asks more, John, for He gave more. 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son——"

"Ay, to a wasted life and a shameful death! If ye call that love."

Parson winced but with an effort he kept his composure. "It was a grand example," he said quietly, "ye'll no deny that, John. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.'"

"Pure waste, I call it," John said, unimpressed, "an' what comes of such doin's, think you? Human nature's the same today as 'twas then. If God be God why don't He change that? No, Parson, there's common sense in all things—should be. I ask no miracles of God."

"John, you frighten me," Parson said huskily. "Never have I seen a man wi' so much to be thankful for; wi' so much to make him see God in everything. Yet ye will not believe in all these good gifts He has showered on ye!" He rose, emphasizing his words with energy: "Then I tell ye, John Strong, that He that gave can take away again. Take you care lest He put ye to such a trial as all yer great strength of mind an' body an' will, shall not avail ye!"

John smiled at the good man's earnestness. "Maybe, maybe," he said. "But what John gets John holds."

"Under God's will!" Parson thundered, striking his fist into his open palm.

John wheeled on him. He was beginning to feel the rasp of opposition. "Under John's will," he said sternly. Then he laughed at his irritation, and when he spoke again his tone was light. "You talk of a trial your God will send me. I have no fear. Well, let it come. 'Twill be a grand fight, an' without fear on my part, Parson, ye may be sure of that."

Parson shook his head sadly. He loved this great obstinate man, with an abiding love, and he would have saved him at the cost of much pain to himself. "John," he said, his love in his voice, "I'll not despair of ye. Ye'll be on yer knees in humbleness yet, but I'm sore afraid that between that day an' this, many sorrows will have come to ye. Ay, an' the dearest triumphs ye have won may be th' price God will demand, an' ye must pay."

John looked hard at the old man. "The dearest triumph of my life," he said slowly, "is that bit of a golden lass out there. I've worked for all I've ever had, but never have I worked as I did to win her. Win I did, though, against them all. Ay, even against herself, for at first she was minded to be afraid of my rough ways. But I swore on oath—not to any God of yours, Parson, but to my stout heart, that I'd have her. An' mine she is. There's no

power in th' universe, save only death, can take her from me now."

Parson was silenced. He had never before seen John in this mood of positive defiance, and he had no weapons with which to attack what he saw as a wilfulness, a wanton spirit of denial. Then it came to him that the man before him was but a child—a boy, feeling his strength and overrating it through obstinate ignorance of the Force he denied. And for the first time in his struggle with John, the good parson did not ask his God to spare the rod. He was, indeed, on the point of a severer speech than he had yet made, when Lysette's laugh came to them from outside, and prevented his indiscretion.

In a moment she came running up the path, breathless, excited, holding in her cupped hands a tiny bird. Neil was laughing and breathless too, as he came in with her.

"See," she said to him, "it's hardly frightened at all. It knows I wouldn't hurt it. We'll make a fire——"

John peered into her hands. "What have ye there?" he asked, poking at it with his finger.

"No, no!" She drew away from him. "You'll frighten it." She opened her hands enough to exhibit the bird. "See, a tiny thing. We found it on the ground. It can't fly."

"A common hedge sparrow," John said. "It's good for nothing, but if ye like I'll make ye a cage for it."

"Oh, no, no, no!" She shook her head vehemently and turned to Neil. "Here, you take it—please."

John laughed. "But it's no manner of use, my own. What 'll ye do with it? They're not good for food. Eh, Parson?"

He shook his head, smiling appreciatively.

Lysette flushed as she gave Neil a startled look. "Oh," she began, then smiled. "We brought it in to save it, John. Can't we save it? Will it die? Oh, no, no, no, we must save it!" She examined the bird in Neil's hands. "I've never seen one so close, before," she murmured, "how could anyone shut it up in a horrid cage? The wee thing!"

"I'll take it to the kitchen," Neil said, "where it'll be warm."

"Yes, yes," Lysette agreed, and ran to open the door, then followed the poet out of the room.

John watched her go. "A tender thing, a wee thing, herself, Parson," he said, laughing. "Ye'll doubt me when I tell ye she gave me the battle of my life. She's not so weak as ye'd think for."

"She's like a flower, John, a delicate, lovely

flower. A little violet—or a tiny rosebud. I marvel ye won her at all! A great, hard giant like you."

John threw back his head and laughed out. "I stole her," he said, "like the giants in the fairy books Neil used to read to me stole the fairy princesses."

Parson rose to go. He was wondering, not so much, as he had said, that John had won the girl, as that he had wanted so delicate a wife. And it came over him for the first time that he did not understand John Strong. Would he, ever?

John had been at home hardly more than a week when the fleet took out for the last catch of the season.

Long Jim had had trouble with the *Elspeth's* crew on the catch before, while John was still on the mainland, and he almost refused, now, to sail without his captain. But John's will was not to be denied, and when the *Elspeth* sank hull down beyond the western horizon, he discovered himself very much alone at home with his bride. Neil tactfully kept out of the way when John was in the house and Elspeth seemed busier than she'd been since John's childhood, as indeed she was, for without Judith's strong arms and swift efficiency she had most of the

work of the cottage on her hands. Lysette was willing enough and might well have learned to be of use, but the old woman was jealous of her prerogatives with the "stranger" and refused to believe in the frail girl's ability in any but the smallest of tasks. Unconsciously she classed Lysette with Neil; useless in practical affairs, and failed miserably in sincere efforts to create for herself a compensating love. She was afraid of her daughter-in-law. Sensed criticism in the silent girl's every glance, and disapproval in her every word, even when these were of actual praise. Her resentment against Lysette for displacing Judith took no account of the younger woman's innocence, as it might have done had the stranger been, not a stranger, but one of her own people. Hers was a literal mind—Lysette was different. That was the beginning and end of it, and it didn't occur to her to hunt a point of contact. She spent most of her time in the kitchen, and bitterly she blamed John for her loss of Judith's companionship and restful help. She missed, too, desperately, the solace of her chimney corner and black pipe, which she was too diffident to continue in the "stranger's" presence.

For her mother-in-law, Lysette had no emotions whatever, save an intense aversion to being left alone with her. She felt the older

woman's resentment of her, and though she was not made angry by it, she was held back from any hopeful attempt toward friendliness.

John had characteristically enough plunged almost at once into the village's activities. He took up his neglected duties on the council, called out the lifeboat for drill, and, after the fleet sailed, began to gather together all the loose threads of his procrastinations.

Lysette found herself more and more alone during the better part of the day, with nothing whatever to occupy her. When she complained to John, he was astounded.

"Nothin' to do?" he said with a tone of surprise, recalling Judith's busy hours in his house. "Mother'll show ye plenty to do, I'm thinkin'."

But Elspeth had nothing to offer and Lysette was too shy to ask. She stood it as long as she could, then one morning, stopping John as he was about to leave the house, she said: "Let me go with you, John?"

"Go with me, pigeon? Do ye know where I'm goin'?"

"I don't care."

"I'm for the ways. Will Langan has chartered the *Petrel* of Tom Rorth's mother, an' he's overhaulin' her. I'm givin' him a hand." He took his cap from the peg and put it on.

"You won't let me go with you, John?" Lysette's voice trembled slightly.

"There's no place for women about a boat shop, my birdling." He kissed her and turned to Elspeth, who was clearing the breakfast table. "Where's Neil, mother?"

"Lighthouse," she answered laconically, and left the room with the dishes she held.

It was the first time John had noted the poet's absences, and for the fraction of an instant he felt annoyed with him.

"I won't get in your way, John," Lysette pleaded. "Please let me come."

"Ye'd be in the way of my eyes," he said, laughing and pulling her ear. "I'd do no work at all, nor would the others, I'm thinkin'."

Elspeth came back into the room.

"Ye'd best take her wi' ye, John," she said, "she's needin' the change from the house."

"What's Neil doin' at the lighthouse?" he asked, ignoring her suggestion.

Elspeth shook her head, but made no reply.

He kissed Lysette and went out feeling distinctly irritated. But by the time he had reached the boat houses the incident had faded. There he took command and, with characteristic energy and intelligence, accomplished for Will Langan two days' work in one.

That night at supper he said to Neil:

"What's it takes ye to the lighthouse?"

"Bruno's a new exchange of books in," Neil said, flushing.

John saw the flush and wondered its cause.

"Haven't ye enough books to keep ye at home? Sure, ye can never finish readin' what's in the house, let alone goin' out to find more."

Neil laughed and involuntarily looked at Lysette.

"They're new ones old Bruno has, John, not poetry at all, but stories an' the like."

"So ye want to be readin' stories, too? I thought that was only for children an' idlers. What about yer poetry? Have ye tired of that —the makin' of it, I mean?"

"It's no man's work," Neil said in a discouraged voice.

John laughed. "An' is readin' Bruno's exchange books?"

"No, but there's man's work *in* them. If I can't do it, I can read about it."

"Ye'll get no good readin' about things ye can't do," John said, amused, "an' there's need for ye at home."

Neil looked at him but said nothing.

"An' what be the need of Neil at home?" Elspeth asked, with a touch of asperity.

"My wish," John said simply.

Elspeth said nothing more, but inside she

raged, and feeling her anger unjustified, she sought justification for it; found a hundred causes for resentment—reasons at which she would have scoffed before the "stranger's" advent. But then Neil had been first in John's consideration, now he — and she herself—were but accessories to the stranger's household. That Neil could take pleasure in the girl's company, as he so evidently did, was a mystery to Elspeth, but she found in that a mitigation of her unhappiness.

As for the poet, he was in a kind of painful paradise, now. He read to Lysette poetry—his own and from "the deathless dead," and they had long fireside talks on the cold, rainy days of early November. Then for a week the sun shone with a brilliance like a gay farewell, and Neil took Lysette for walks about the village and along the cliffs and back among the hills.

Wrapped in a warm cloak, her shining hair covered in an old sou'wester of Neil's, Lysette was like a boy out of school. She would take Neil's hand at the top of a hill and start running down with him, faster and faster until their feet wouldn't go fast enough, then swing him round on a long curve till they were facing up hill again. Out of breath, exhausted, gasping, they'd throw themselves down to rest, silent but

happy in a divine companionship of complete understanding.

They talked very little on these rambles. Neil would sometimes point out a view and they'd stand gazing a while, then turn and look at each other and smile. Or Lysette would stop suddenly, finger to lips, and they'd listen to some belated singer for a moment, forgetting himself and the season. And again the look and smile, but seldom comment.

The wind cut their faces and swept away their breaths, as November aged and with age grew colder. Battling against it, helping each other, one walking backward while the other led—turn and turn about—running from shelter to shelter, they'd get to laughing sometimes until they'd both fall flat gasping for breath.

Their appetites were prodigious, and for the first time in his life Neil ate anything and everything his mother put before him.

John saw the health glowing in his bride's cheeks and eyes, and was mightily pleased. In those days of his wooing Lysette's pale face and listless movements had, more than once, given him pause. But each time, he'd thought: "The outdoors and the sparkling air of the Islands 'll put health into her." And now he saw his judgment justified.

Elspeth, too, was pleased. But her pleasure

took the form of self-condemnation, rather. She'd been too hard on the girl, she thought, as she watched Neil's appetite and caught, now and then, a light in his eyes she'd never seen there before. Her affection for Lysette was born of this light—a gift to Neil, as she somehow sensed it. But unaccountably she did not cease to feel a dull resentment against John's masterful captaincy of their lives. He had everything, and Neil nothing—unless John chose he should have! And Judith—her life ruined through John's blindness. No, she could not blame Lysette for Judith's pain. Very likely she hadn't even known of Judith's existence. And Elspeth began to wonder, a little vaguely, if that light would have come to Neil's eyes, that lilt to his voice, if John *had* married Judith.

December was close upon them when the first boat homed in from the grounds, her well but half filled. Five days later the entire fleet was in, except the *Elspeth,* and when, after a full week more, she hove in sight, John discovered a new sensation while he watched her beat up the bay, close hauled against a stiff no'ther, her fo'cas'le sheeted in ice.

He waited at the landing-place with impatience till she was at moorings, then went aboard her and listened to Long Jim's account of the

voyage, with something very like homesickness teasing at his heart.

When, in the course of another fortnight, the work of landing, packing and shipping the catch, of unbending the sails, clearing the rigging and unshipping the spars done, and the schooner up on the hard, John found himself without occupation. The thousand odd activities of former winters seemed strangely to fail his interest. They took on a triviality to him which robbed them of all but their drudgery. At the boat houses or at Malcolm's the talk seemed trifling to a degree unthought of in former years. Coarse jests woven of the domestic squabbles and difficulties of the village no longer brought a ready smile to his eyes or a quick answer to his lips. And above all he found his associates wearisome. They would argue for hours—days even—over the simplest propositions for the improvement or advantage of Eyre. They'd walk all round a subject, inspecting it from every possible angle as it were, while to him its faults or advantages were plainly visible on its face. He soon discovered, however, that they came to his view of the matter in the end, and realized that a new spirit was among them. He did not seek a reason for their changed attitude toward him, but fell into the habit of leaving the council as soon as he'd made his proposi-

tion. With weary patience he'd say: "When ye've got through talkin' about it, an' have made up yer minds, let me know an' I'll be with ye again."

The second time this happened, Kennedy jumped to his feet and shouted after him: "If ye're not goin' to stay at the meetin's, John Strong, ye can just resign, an' let somebody else have the chair!"

John turned back and looked at the angry, flushed faces of the six men. They seemed to him a lot of children playing a game they knew very little about, and taking it too seriously, wishing to bait the only one of them who did know what he was about. With a contemptuous laugh, he said:

"Ye have it, Kennedy. Is that satisfactory?"

He looked from one to another of them, and then turned to go. But Harrod stopped him this time.

"No, no, John," he said, "wait——"

"I'll do my waitin' at home," John interrupted, "ye can send me word when ye've made up yer minds. I've business of my own to look after."

But as before he heard no more about resigning, and when another time he left them to argue some trivial point, no one said anything to him about staying.

The intense cold and the high winds kept Lysette indoors, much of the time, now. Her color waned and she lost most of her appetite. John took her out with him, and brought her home in his arms, exhausted, half frozen, to be put to bed by Elspeth and mothered with warming pans and hot lemon toddy—and a sharp scolding for John—"Ye stupid man, John! wi' yer lack-sense, takin' a delicate thing like her out in this bitter wind!"

In the long months of his wooing, he had exhausted Lysette's interest in the sea, and she his in books. He could not listen to poetry, now, even when she read it. He was wearied of a thing that had served its purpose. He no longer had need of it. A strange lassitude came upon him. The long walks alone in the keen wind, over snow and ice, failed to refresh him, and he would return to the cottage, taciturn, absorbed in strangely idle thoughts, indifferent to accomplishment.

Where were his dreams, his ambitions, his certitudes? Where his passion for life?

He did not ask himself these questions. He was not introspective, but he was vaguely troubled, and, unaware of his need, he missed Judith's responsive mind and sustaining interest.

The severe winter threatened te[illegible] in-

terminable. Then with a sudden joy, like the release from pain, he heard Lysette's hope of a son for him, and he could think of nothing else.

His lassitude dropped from him like a shed cloak, while his passion for life flowed with accelerated vigor. His ambitions leaped into renewal and he began to dream again. A son! He plunged once more into the business of Eyre, and ceased to think of his associates on the council as children at a game, but argued with them to their heart's content, carrying his points with an energy and interest that inspired instead of antagonizing them.

In the village the sight of a baby woke a light in his face and a joyous interest which soon brought every mother in Eyre to his feet. His enthusiasms, like his laugh, were contagious. He drove with such a whelming stroke, with such a boldness of touch, that he was irresistible, and Eyre began at last to love him—to love him, at last, because, at last, he had begun to love.

Spring was upon him almost before he was ready for her. The work of getting the boats in commission began. Tom Rorth came home. He'd heard of John's marriage, from his mother, and hope revived in his sore heart. John greeted

him like a brother, shook his hand and asked his pardon.

"We be men, Tom. Let us forget the rest. I've missed ye sore."

"I hear ye're married?" Tom said, finding speech difficult.

"Ay, to the lass of lasses," John said heartily. "Ye must come up an' make friends with her, Tom. She's a shy thing, but she knows you a'ready, for I've told her of ye many a time."

But Tom hadn't come home all the way from Australia to see John Strong's wife. He had other fish to fry, as he put it to himself. But it took him a full week before he could screw up enough courage to get to the frying of them. It was the day before the fleet sailed that he went to Judith's, and found Lisal Wender, Judith's cousin, with her. Lisal rose to leave the room but Judith called her back. "No, no, Lisal, Tom may speak his mind to us both."

Lisal was nothing loath to stay. She had been in love with Tom Rorth almost as long as Tom had been in love with Judith.

" 'Tis no secret," Tom said, smiling wistfully—and Lisal wondered how any girl alive could help herself loving the tall gaunt man—"I want ye to marry me this day, Judith." He twisted his cap in his sinewy hands. "I've learned myself somewhat since I've been away

from ye, Judith. I've learned myself to hold on, Judith. An' I'll never lose my grip again, whatever ye say, Judith. But I'd find it a deal easier if ye 'll have me, girl?"

Judith looked up at him as he stopped speaking. "Tom," she said, "if I was wed to another, would ye wed Lisal here, if she wanted you as ye say ye want me?"

"I would," Tom said fervently, not suspecting a trap.

"Then wed her," Judith said cruelly, "for I'm wed to another, Tom Rorth, as fast as ever the weddin' ring could bind, though I have none."

Tom flushed painfully. "Judith," he said, a note of anger in his steady voice, "ye have no heart. If ye loved another, as ye say, ye could understand what I feel, an' ye'd not make a mock of my love." He stood up.

"I've made no mock of your love, Tom," Judith said, smiling to herself. "I but asked ye a plain question an' spoke by your plain answer."

"No," said Tom, "ye've no heart. Ye make a mock of me. An' of Lisal, too," he added resentfully, "an' I'm not one to forget lightly. Good day to ye."

He closed the door with a bang and the two

women heard him swear as he went down the garden walk.

Lisal turned a white, tear-stained face upon Judith.

"Oh! Oh!" she cried, "how could ye say such a thing? Oh, he'll despise me now, Judith!"

"I've got ye a husband, Lisal. Why should Tom despise ye, girl? He'll ask ye first thing the fleet's home again."

The winter just past had left its ineradicable mark upon Judith. She had found herself, as strong souls do, under the ordeal by fire, and the assuagement of pain—another's pain—was her passion, now. Her own pain was bearable only on that condition, for in the contemplation of suffering and the whole-hearted effort to relieve it, she could forget herself completely. Parson had many times recalled, involuntarily, the old saw—"an ill wind that blows nobody good"—when he had Judith's strength and spirit by his side in some all but hopeless struggle with ignorance and stupidity. Or even more, when some sorrow past comforting threatened the very reason of one of his beloved flock. It was then Judith's tact and understanding, and tireless endurance, seemed a miracle indeed. And how often the good man had pondered the mystery of this splendid creature

put to the torture that others might be saved from it!

But with all her tenderness for the suffering of others, Judith had none for Tom's love of her. She denied him the right to love her and to suffer for her. There was to her heart but one man—all the others were but mere men and did not come within the mystic circle of its knowledge.

Next morning the fleet sailed at dawn. Judith stood on the point of the headland and watched Tom Rorth's schooner fighting up against the heavy seas kicked up by a half gale from the west which had been blowing since midnight. The *Elspeth* made a flying start from her moorings under the lee of the western headland, every inch of canvas spread, hugging the shore to take advantage of the back current, and depending upon her topsails for steerage way.

"Tom'll try to cross his bow," Judith murmured, her heart beating with an undying excitement as she watched the rival skippers' masterly handling of their boats. Now and then she caught the snap of the *Elspeth's* jibs or the bang and rattle of the sheet tackles as the wind, drawing round the promontory, would strike the schooner head on. "Tom'll never learn!" she thought, as she saw the *Petrel's* bow knocked off by sea after sea, then, as if in

answer to her thought, Tom's schooner went about and ran in under the lee of the land, not two boat lengths astern of the *Elspeth,* and broke out her topsails and maintopmast staysail. Now it was closer, the race, for every gust of heading wind struck the *Elspeth* first and gave the *Petrel* a chance to meet it advantageously. Before the schooners had reached abreast the watching girl, Tom had the *Petrel's* bowsprit nosing the *Elspeth's* taffrail. Judith realized his intention to head the *Elspeth* from going about on the port tack when she got the wind full. This would drive John into the heavier seas and Tom would keep the smooth water with room enough and to spare. Judith watched breathless for John's manoeuvre. The next gust did for Tom just what Judith had feared. The *Elspeth,* forced to bear away as the wind struck her head on, gave the *Petrel* room, and in another moment the two schooners were almost abeam—the *Petrel* to windward.

Judith could hear John's great laugh and voice, though his words were indistinguishable to her.

"What'll he do?" she whispered, trembling with excitement.

But she was to see her hero broader than the moment. John cared not at all that Tom had weathered him. He let the *Petrel* take the next

gust of head wind, and as she fell away, her bowsprit nearly fouling the *Elspeth's* fore shrouds, he luffed into the gust, forcing the *Petrel* about, lowered away his light sails, squared away and kept his course to green water. Tom tried to follow, but too close in, he lost the wind and long before the rival boats were hidden by the flying spume, Judith saw the *Elspeth* leading by three lengths and holding a good half point closer to the wind at that.

She shut the glass with a clatter and slowly took her way to the headland cottage, where she found Elspeth getting the breakfast in a kitchen filled with smoke.

"Asch, t' west win'!" the older woman exclaimed as Judith entered, and at sight of the beloved girl, went to her and grasped her arms and wept. Then without full cognizance of her actions sat idly while she watched Judith work, and talked to her.

"T' west win' makes it smoke like all possessed," she muttered.

"Ye should make John put a wind shield on the chimney as I've told him this many year," Judith said, throwing open windows and draughts.

"John!" Elspeth sniffed. "He's no for th' work about the house nowadays."

"Marriage makes a man different," Judith commented.

"She's a strange thing." Elspeth heaved a sigh, beginning regret, ending satisfaction. Judith was back—what mattered the rest? "Aye, strange. Like a wee bird, ye'd think th' winds'd blow to pieces, but there's a strength in her. I know by the look she gives John sometimes."

"The weak is strong to have their way mostly," Judith said abstractedly.

"She hasn't her way." Elspeth shook her head dubiously. "I'm not for pryin', as ye know, Judith, but I'm thinkin' she's not so happy. They's days together she never speaks for hours at a time."

"Maybe it's her way," Judith said judicially.

The morning had broken gray and threatening, and now fulfilled its promise. A cold driving rain clattered upon the roof, and the big room of the cottage was chill and drear. Judith had a fire going in the great chimney, and when Lysette came in to breakfast dressed in a delicate negligee of lace and thin stuffs she exclaimed with delight.

Neil, coming in a moment after, exclaimed with wonder. He had been to the landing to watch the fleet take out, and on the way back had wandered about in the rain and bitter wind,

groaning under the weight of his disabilities. Now he saw the fresh fire of heavy logs that no one but John could lift to fetch in, and he stared at Lysette as though suspecting her of having deceived them all as to her strength.

"Who made the fire?" he asked.

Lysette looked at him in surprise.

"John, I suppose," she said.

Neil looked toward the kitchen door as his eager ear caught the sound of voices. He stepped to the door and opened it. "Judith!" he exclaimed under his breath. He hesitated, then, turning to Lysette, said gently:

"Judith's come back."

Lysette looked at him, frightened.

"What for?"

"To help mother, I'm sure. She's been here —" he interrupted himself to take off his dripping oilies, and when he had finished, Judith and Elspeth had come into the room. Neil watched the two younger women, himself quite at a loss for words.

Judith said: "Well, Neil?" turned to Lysette, and kissed her cheek. "Elspeth'll be needin' a hand now John's away."

Lysette only stared at Judith, paling a little, then with a visible effort she smiled, and almost in a whisper said:

"You're very strong."

The door was opened from without. A grizzled head poked in, dripping water from the tarpaulin hat, and a squeaky voice said:

"John sent me."

Judith stepped to the door and dragged the old man inside.

" 'Tis David," Elspeth murmured.

"John sent ye for what?" Judith asked sharply.

"Chores," David answered laconically, and stood looking dubiously at the pool of water the rain dripping from his coat was making on the floor.

"Th' bain't none," Judith said, took the old man by the arm and, opening the door, put him outside, closing it after him. "David!" she muttered. "Chores!"

The door opened again and David's head came in as far as the eyes.

"Do un y'self, you, Judy!" he squeaked and shut the door quickly.

Judy was the nickname by which the children had teased Judith in her school days. No one had dared to call her by that name for many years. An instant her anger flamed, then she laughed. "Old David! John must be out of his head to think old David's a use."

"He's better than nothing," Neil suggested. He was relieved beyond measure to see Judith

back in the house, a load lifted from his mind. "John didn't know you'd be here, Judith," he added incautiously.

"Where'd he think I'd be, with Elspeth left alone?" Judith asked scornfully.

"True," Neil said tactfully, "he should have known you'd not leave mother to my care."

Elspeth looked at him, about to protest, but met his tender smile and answered it with another. These two had no need of words.

Lysette essayed to speak but shyness caught her.

Elspeth saw her flush, and understood. "They's no need for you to waste yer stren'th, Lysette," she said gently, her gratitude for Judith's return reflected upon her daughter-in-law. "You've another life beside yer own to think of now."

Judith started, and looked quickly from Elspeth to Lysette. The color slowly left her cheeks. Neil flushed painfully and kept his eyes to his plate for the rest of the meal.

CHAPTER VIII

When the *Elspeth* had fetched safely around the headland and was squared off for the banks, John called Long Jim to the wheel, and himself stood, back against the weather rail, his weight on his forearms, his elbows jutting outboard, his eyes on the *Petrel* plunging through the heavy seas, a good cable's length astern and half as far to leeward. But his mind was not with his eyes. He was thinking of the future—his son. He never doubted, but back of faith in his fortune was a definite consciousness of the possibility of disappointment. He tried to visualize the "little lad" and failed. His objective mind succeeded only in recalling to him picture after picture of his younger brother—now a babe crying weakly, now a tiny child messing idly in the sand, now a half-grown youth dreaming by the fireside. And always in the picture, Judith watching with him. He smiled to himself at memory of a dozen incidents of his brother's education under the tyrant girl. And suddenly a picture in deep colors flashed on the mirror of his mind: the scene in his home, when, for the single time in his knowledge of

her, Judith had looked into his eyes revealing her soul to him naked and unashamed. In spite of all his strength, called upon instinctively to shield him, his heart leapt, his brows drew together in a frown, and an involuntary groan escaped his throat.

Long Jim at the wheel, casting a backward glance, now and again, at the following fleet, wondered at his captain's abstraction, and with characteristic human perversity of judgment wondered what was "wrong" with him. For village tongues had not been idle with the strange woman John Strong had brought among them, and resentment at her indifference had grown apace, watered as it was with their ignorance of her, and manured with John's arrogant pride. Gossip was already rife with disaster to the union, and Long Jim Fein was interested to see what he took to be the beginnings of prophecy's fulfillment.

But John's abstraction didn't last. The sea was in his blood. He loved it, and the long rush of surging green water past the schooner's polished sides. Every creak of spar or clank of tackle, shriek of wind in rigging or thunder of canvas as the schooner was put about, was music to his spirit. In them he heard the beat of wings—the wings of his exalted ego.

The *Petrel's* half cable length to leeward got

her the North Current first. The Race, boiling down against the wind, between Hulldown Island and Ware Shoals like a giant tide-rip, caught the schooner's bow as she ploughed into it, and swung her into the wind. As she paid off again, John exclaimed to see her topsails break out and her jib topsail go aloft.

Long Jim grinned. "Tom thinks to hold her in the chop an' save her pitchin'—Guds! Look at her fly!"

In the chop, the sea broken up by the cross waves, the *Petrel* had practically smooth water, and with the four-knot current, she did seem to fly.

"Ay, an' see her heel," John laughed.

They watched her for some minutes, till long Jim, sensing the crew's anxiety, said: "Will I make the chop?"

John looked aloft, then to the lee scuppers awash, and shook his head. "No," he said, "Tom'll be carryin' something away when he strikes open water again. We'll be there to pick up his canvas for him."

"Follerin'," Long Jim grumbled.

"Better foller than turn back," John laughed. "But we'll catch him again outside, if he does make it."

The *Petrel* forged ahead in the current, and twenty minutes later, as she drew abeam the

Elspeth, Tom, at the wheel, waved his cap. John answered with a wave of his arm, and stood suddenly erect as he saw the *Petrel's* foretopmast back-stay leap from the dead eye as though shot skyward from a gun. They heard the crash and bang of the cracking topmast and bellying jib as the mass struck water, saw the *Petrel* heel over with the strain of tugging canvas scooping tons of water, till her keel showed clear.

"God hold his weather shrouds!" John muttered. Then as the *Petrel* swung round, jibing her mainsail with the thunder of firing guns, they all saw three men struggling in the chop. "Port!" John shouted. "All hands . . . Slack sheets . . . Steady!" and ran forward as the *Elspeth* paid off before the wind. He watched the men for a few minutes as the *Elspeth* ploughed down toward them, then: "Stand by to launch two boats!" he shouted through his hands, and as he turned his eyes back to the *Petrel,* saw Tom Rorth dive from the taffrail

. . . .

The *Petrel* made harbor that night, and landed three very sick men. After they were snug in their homes and Parson had reported them in no immediate danger, Tom Rorth took his way to the headland cottage. He believed that life was in his body and in those of his men by the

breadth of a hair, and he was determined that John's new wife should learn of her husband's deed from no other than himself.

Some of the things he'd heard about the young woman—that she was different and uppish, and talked like a book—came to him, and he knocked at the cottage door with a certain diffidence. It opened and he looked into the sombre eyes of Judith Nyte. Tom took a backward step and stood staring, his purpose entirely gone from his mind.

Judith caught a hand over her mouth and the color went from her face, leaving it livid under her tan. She stepped outside and closed the door after her.

"Tom!" she whispered, "ye've news?"

Tom recovered himself slowly, wondering at Judith's pallor, and trying to acount for it. His delay confirmed Judith's fears and she murmured:

"John's——" but could get no further.

"It's John's wife I'm here to see," Tom said stiffly, the memory of his last interview with Judith beginning to rankle.

Judith stepped toward him. "No, no, Tom!" she whispered. "Tell it to me!"

Tom's jaw gave. "Tell it to you?" he said, mystified, then sudden anger gripped him.

"Shameful!!" he muttered, "what be you doin' in John Strong's house?"

Judith shut her eyes and made a side movement of her head. As she opened them again Tom tried to pass her. She caught him by the arms and held him—"For God's sake, speak! Can ye no speak, man? Tom! Tom!" she cried in a strangled voice, the terror in her face distorting it grotesquely.

He saw now what she feared, but it only angered him the more, and he would not save her pain. He took her wrists and with a jerk freed himself, and pushing by her, opened the cottage door.

On the settle by the chimney he saw Lysette, and at her feet, Neil. The poet had an open book in his hand and looked up as Tom stepped in and shut the door.

"Tom Rorth!" he said, rising, "I thought ye were with the fleet?"

"I was," Tom said, looking at Lysette. "Carried away foretopmas' an' had to put back."

The door opened again and Judith came in. She stood looking at Lysette and waiting for Tom's news, her shoulders crouched as though to receive a blow.

Tom fumbled with his cap a moment, then with a little deprecatory laugh which drew Judith's astonished eyes upon him, he said:

"Had some men washed ov'board. Will Langan, an' Joe Shortsleeve, an' Eddy Wells. John saved they lives—an' mine too." . . . Involuntarily his eyes turned to Judith's as he paused. "I went in after 'em, but John it was that saved us all."

Lysette was standing now, her hands clutching the back of the settle. Neil stepped around the seat. "And John—he's safe?"

"Ay, he's safe," Tom said.

Judith exclaimed unintelligibly and leaned heavily against the wall, turning her face away from the others. Lysette watched her furtively.

"Sit down, Tom, and tell us," Neil said, drawing a chair from the corner.

Tom took the chair, and seated on its edge told the tale as he saw it. He told each tiny detail and the why of every move he had made, and his conjectures as to the *Elspeth's* movements. He hadn't seen John coming to his rescue and knew nothing of it till he rose after going down with Will and Eddy.

Hardly a word of it all was intelligible to the woman Tom had come to tell it to, but to Judith Nyte, the detailed story was like a picture thrown on a screen. She saw the schooner's topmast go, heard the rending wood and flapping canvas—and Tom Rorth's shouted orders. She saw the jib topsail stay caught around the

starboard cat-head, and felt the heel of the vessel as the sail bellied, full of water. She saw John running forward as the Elspeth bore away down the wind, and heard his great voice calling for the boats . . . saw him dive as the *Elspeth* rounded to with jibs to windward. Sick with excitement, she followed Tom's diagram on the floor, and knew without being told that John must have passed Will Langan to reach Joe Shortsleeve. And saw him turn and fight back against the current, swimming with one arm, for his life and the lives of four other men. She felt keenly every sensation the big man before her had felt but dimly, and when Tom told of going under with his two men, Judith clutched her throat, holding her breath as though she were actually smothered in icy water.

When the tale was finished and Tom rose to go, she went to the door with him and said: "Lisal'll be waitin' for ye at my house, Tom."

Tom spat but made no reply. His anger choked him. He turned away from her and strode off down the path, slamming the gate to such effect that the fence rocked with the impact.

"Poor Tom," Judith muttered, "he doesn't know I'm savin' him a deal of sorrow."

No, Tom only knew her deliberately, wantonly

cruel, and thanked God he'd escaped marriage with her! Went straight as a swallow to Judith's house and got Lisal Wender's promise to be his wife.

When they were alone together again, Lysette begged Neil for enlightenment. "I don't know what happened," she said, "or what John did at all!"

Neil told her, avoiding technical terms. But in the rendering of the tale his poetic fancy invested it with the romance and drama of the sea, making it vivid and terrible to the inexperienced girl.

"Oh!" she cried when he had finished, "and do such things happen often?"

"Not such things as John's work in this," Neil said, smiling, "for most times when a man is washed overboard in a sea there's no chance for him."

He told her of his father's death and of a dozen dramatic rescues and tragic losses. Tales gleaned here and there, in Malcolm's boat shop, from old Bruno at the lighthouse and from Parson, till the listening girl began for the first time to realize a little the calling to which her husband belonged. The margin of a single second of time, perhaps, between death and life—the last stroke of a powerful swimm[illegible] convulsive effort of a man's ins[illegible]

live—the mere fortuitous hollow or the crest of a wave; life in one, death in the other. And she began to realize, too, for the first time the part that women have to bear in such a calling.

May came bringing with her the real spring. Lysette took to walking on the headland and watching the sea for John's return. She would sit or stroll up and down for hours, happier than she'd been since she had left her home. Looking forward to the coming of summer, and soothed by the calm sea and effulgent sky, she began to forget her resentments and reserves. Thus when Judith, keeping an eye out for signs of the fleet, surprised her singing, one sunset hour, she smiled responsively.

Judith scanned the horizon. "They'll not be in tonight, I'm thinkin'."

"How can you tell?" Lysette asked.

"It'll be dark before they'd make harbor, if they was in sight now," Judith explained. "John's the only one can make a moorin' in the dark. But he'll likely stay with the fleet."

Lysette got to her feet. "Oh, I'd love to see them come in."

"We'll sight them at dawn, likely," Judith said, "if ye can be up in time?"

"How can you tell?" Lysette was puzzled. "Neil said they mightn't be in for days, yet."

Judith smiled at the brazen sky. "I feel it," she said, "I can't say how."

"Her heart tells her!" Lysette thought, and found, in her own, instead of anger, pity.

Next morning an hour after dawn Lysette steadied by Judith's arm about her made out through the heavy glass her husband's white schooner leading the fleet home bound. And John, aboard the *Elspeth* caught the flutter of women's skirts as he rounded the headland and close hauled for the run to harbor.

"Mother an' Lysette," he said, pointing them out to Long Jim, and thought of the many times —how many years?—he'd sighted Judith on that very spot. But when he got home and found Judith there and learned that it was she with Lysette his delight was naïve.

Alone with his wife he seemed to discover the barrier of those winter months dispersed. She didn't want him out of her sight, and begged to be taken to the village, the ways—anywhere he was himself going to be. She would not be left alone in the house. Parson had ordered exercise for her and she needed John's hand— "No, no," she cried, "Neil's not quick enough, Judith has her work—John!" And insistently she begged him not to go to sea again. Told

him of Tom Rorth's visit, and of Neil's elucidation of Tom's story. "Suppose your boats hadn't arrived just when they did, John? You'd be out there now! Drowned——" she wrung her hands and covered her face with them.

John attempted to soothe her with half promises, and when this failed of effect, he tried to belittle the danger. But to that final feminine argument—tears—he had no answer. At first it brought out all his tenderness for her, and she very nearly won her point. But at each succession of weeping his reaction to it was less tender, more irritable. He was incapable of dealing with weakness save with authority, and here he found authority a bludgeon—hysterics the result of its use. Distracted, he sought Parson's advice.

"Ye'd better give in till the little one's landed, John."

But this didn't jump with his ideas at all.

"Where'll such givin' in end?" he asked.

"Where'll not givin' in end? That's more to the point, my son. You must handle these things as they require. Lysette's a delicate woman; not like—our own girls, used to rough weather. Ye've no wish to see yer son like Neil—if it be a son. One poet in a family is enough, I'm thinkin'."

"'Twould never do, that, Parson," John said decidedly. "I hoped ye'd have some remedy I could take an' use. But once give in an' where's it to end? My wife married a fisherman, an' I can't be changin' that at this day."

At home he found his mother unwontedly severe with him.

"Ye be drivin' th' poor child wild wi' yer obstinacy, John," she said, and refused to argue the matter. Judith, divided between contempt and pity for Lysette, quite unintentionally stiffened John's "obstinacy" by remarking that the weak always had their way in the end—"sense or no sense."

Neil, who had heard this often enough and knew its utter falseness, was infuriated by the remark applied to Lysette, and by its effect upon John. But he dared not speak for fear of showing his heart. He fled the house, and Parson came upon him in the woods sobbing and twisting his hands together. He was leaning against a birch tree and did not turn or change his position when Parson spoke to him.

"What's it, my boy?" the old man said, touching his sleeve. "Come, tell yer old friend, that brought ye into world, Neil. Surely there's no sorrow so big but there's a help in talkin' it out with one that loves ye."

At this Neil broke down utterly, and poured out his pent up trouble, trembling as with chill, and stammering his words through uncontrollable sobs.

"I can't help it, Parson!" he cried, "I loved her before ever I saw her—long before!" And with a burst of anger which dried his tears with its heat, he said: "And I hate John! I've always hated him—I didn't know it till lately, but I've always hated him—he's a tyrant! And now——" His tears began afresh as he thought of that tender girl unhappy in the tyrant's power.

Parson put an arm about his shoulders and gently led him to see the error of his ways.

"Come, my boy, John's made it easy for you all yer life. You've no right to hate him."

"That's it," Neil cried, "I'm only a slave! Everything is John's. I live only by his will—and must do his bidding like a slave!"

"Here's your chance, then, to square yerself an' match obligation for obligation. John's given you everything ye have; let you give him of your best, an' that way you'll turn th' balance in yer own favor. It's easy for John to give to you, but it'll be hard for you to give to John. No man's a slave that can control himself against his own will. An' there's no

obligation where there's love. Let your love overflow to John as well, and then talk of obligation! But not while ye're hatin' anybody on earth, my son, whether they've done ye good or harm."

Parson did not worry about the boy's love for his brother's wife. He, like everyone else except Neil's mother, underrated his capacity for feeling, made the mistake of crediting only the strong with strength.

But that was not to be wondered at, for Neil was by this thoroughly ashamed of his outburst and desperately ashamed of his tears. He smiled, and when they parted no one would have known that he suffered more than a passing irritation with his brother.

John compromised with himself and the situation by coming home from his next trip with a half-filled well, only to be convinced that his compromise was unnecessary and his wisdom unimpeachable. Lysette made no attempt to keep him this time. She greeted him with enthusiasm and when he was with her, clung to him. She seemed to feel the need of contact with him to draw her strength.

"You are my Earth," she told him, "and I the struggling Antaeus."

"An' who's Antaeus?" he asked, holding her on his knees.

She told him. And when he asked with whom or with what she struggled, she would not say, till he pressed for an answer, then she said "Myself."

To Parson, John said: "My way was best after all."

"Ye should never judge a boat on the ways, John," Parson replied, and refused to interpret his saw. The old man was losing patience with this spirit of arrogant certitude. Beginning, too, to feel that he was not serving his God in loving the man too much.

"Well," John said, laughing at Parson's severe manner, "they be only a couple more trips this season. After that I've a mind to take your advice. I've made my fortune, now I'll be wantin' to stay by an' see the little man grow."

"God grant it be a man child," Parson muttered.

"Ay, God grant it," John echoed, smiling into his pipe bowl, hardly conscious of the words he'd used.

Parson, looking up in surprise, was softened by the expression on John's face. "He's but a child, himself," he thought. And all his love for this big man he'd known from the hour of

his birth, flowed at the sight of that faraway look of tender pride.

"Ah, John, John, I would I could gi' ye the one thing ye lack," he thought, and prayed silently for strength to do his manifest duty by this obstinate man.

CHAPTER IX

September brought high winds and humid heat, until sundown, then chill, still air with low dews and damp grasses. Most of the day Lysette lay in the hammock under the oaks and watched the changing foliage, while Neil read to her, and in the evenings on the settle by the fire listened to Judith and Elspeth talk of the village. She was listless and at the same time restive. Sleeping little and weeping much.

"There be something on her mind," Parson said to Judith. "See if you can get what's troublin' the child. She should be free from worry. I can't think what it can be."

"I know," Judith told him. "I wish John had the sense of a man!"

"Ye think she worries for John?" he asked. "I didn't get that notion, when I talked wi' her, Judith."

"John should have bided, as ye told him to do. When she's a mother she'll have her babe to mind," she insisted.

Parson considered. "Aye," he said, "but till then?"

"John should have bided," Judith repeated obstinately.

But Parson was not satisfied and tried to get at Lysette's trouble. He took her for walks and told her stories of his work, tried to draw her to comment on them. But she listened, indifferent, and lost herself in day-dreams as soon as he was silent. Then he told her tales of men he'd known who had followed the sea in fair weather and foul, and had died in their beds of old age.

"I'm not afraid for John," she assured him, "I'm afraid—afraid——"

Parson waited for her to continue. Something told him that it was life, not death, she feared. And his anger against John, which had grown of late, intermittent but recurringly stronger, drove him to frown.

Lysette smiled up at him. "I'm afraid for my child," she said.

Parson took her hand to help her over the stile they had come to. "Afraid of what?" he asked. But she kept her eyes to the path as though it were rough and needed a deal of careful stepping, and made no answer. Then he talked to her of duty, of self-control, of sin, and of God's love. But he knew that he was getting her nowhere with his talk. He wanted her to talk and he could not make her.

He watched her face for signs, hoping for a glimpse which might put him on the road to

her heart, and marvelled at her delicate beauty; the soft, pale skin like a child's, with that strange, fitful glow of color underneath, like flame under thin shell, the delicate coloring of dawn, opalescent like reflections from a faint rainbow. And the corn silk hair—"Proserpina," he called her, in thought, and smiled at the picture of John in the rôle of Pluto. "No," he shook his head, "a fairy princess, perhaps, fit for palaces and servitors and a Prince Charming, is more like her."

At the meeting of the paths, they came upon Judith returning package-laden from the village, and Parson had a sense as of one who releases a burden—a sense of rest. Judith always gave him that feeling. She was restful as all benevolent power is restful, begetting confidence, and so relieving of responsibility. A serene determination, blended with an unthought about consciousness of strength, of superlative energies, latent but awake, as though there were kingdoms to conquer and crowns to gain and she the destined instrument of fortune. At once static and dynamic, like the earth—a creature of complete capability, of practical, effective force, and nothing, indeed nothing, beyond her strength. That was the feeling he had when he was with Judith. John's strength gave him another feeling altogether. A feeling

of combativeness — not antagonism, but unrepose; of battle, of force to be harnessed, controlled, and, too, an element of fear lest unrestrained it run amuck.

Parson watched the contrasting women as they made their way up the path to the cottage. He shook his head and sighed deeply, then lifting his hands in a gesture of futility let them fall to his sides again as he turned away.

"The glass is fallin'," Elspeth said, as Judith and Lysette entered the house. "I wish Neil was to home."

Lysette went on to her own room, smiling dreamily, her thoughts so far inward that Elspeth's words did not penetrate to them.

"Old Bruno's down with rheumatism," Judith said, "Neil's waitin' to light up for him, likely."

Elspeth standing at the window looked up at the scurrying clouds. "It's comin' on to blow," she said nervously, "I wish John was to home."

Judith laughed, and as she passed, on her way to the kitchen with her packages, leaned over and kissed the old woman's cheek. "There's no need to worry yet," she said. John's weathered many a gale before now, an' likely will again. If it blows, I'll row out an' fetch Neil in myself."

All day the wind came in sudden gusts with long intervals of whispering and sighing be-

tween, like any sentimental lover driven helplessly by jealous thoughts to bursts of uncontrollable anger. The simile heightened, too, by the continuous ogganition of distant thunder, pierced, now and again, with sharper growls reverberated from cliff to cliff.

Lysette wandered back and forth about the big room, sitting for a moment cuddled against Elspeth on the settle by the fire, and again up and watching from the window.

Toward afternoon Parson called for Elspeth. Mrs. Rorth, Tom's mother, was ill and wanted her. By early dusk the wind had blown up to half a gale, with sharp squalls of rain beginning and ceasing with the same suddenness the wind had affected earlier in the day.

"I'll go down to the landin' an' see if Neil's in," Judith said, crackling noisily in a great tarpaulin coat, her head covered in a shawl.

"Wait till mother comes back," Lysette begged querulously, "I'm afraid to be alone!"

"Elspeth'll be in any time now," Judith said. "I promised to go for Neil if he wasn't in by dark. Elspeth'll worry herself sick if he's not here when she comes."

She lighted the big lamp and went out.

Lysette, left alone, tried to read or sew, but at each sudden gust of rain she started and looked apprehensively about the shadowy room.

Finally she gave up the attempt to occupy herself and sat crouched near the fire, trembling.

Judith had been gone hardly ten minutes, though it had seemed hours to the nervous girl, when Neil came in. He took off his dripping oilies and went in to stir the fire. "Lysette!" he cried, seeing her crouching figure.

"It's been lonely, Neil," she whispered, smiling up at him.

"The wind has been too sharp for you today," he said, answering her smile. "You've been shut in here all alone?"

She got up and went to the settle. "It's been lonely. There's a storm coming."

"It's only the edge of it we're getting. It'll blow itself out by morning, likely."

"I was frightened till you came," she went on, deprecatingly, "but now——"

"Poor dove," he murmured as she broke off and turned away, then aloud he said: "There's nothing to be afraid of."

"But all alone, Neil! Judith was here, and mother, but I felt all alone. Where have you been?"

"At the lighthouse; old Bruno's down with his rheumatism."

"You won't——" She stood up and clasped her hands in childish appeal. "You'll not leave me alone again, Neil? Not while John's out at

sea! I musn't be left alone now, Neil—I—mustn't!"

Neil turned his eyes to the fire and warmed his hands. "No fear of that for a while," he said, "the fleet's sighted."

She turned to him, startled, tears in her voice:

"Neil!"

"Gale's drove 'em in, belike. Must be worse at sea. John's leading."

Lysette rose and went to the window. "How soon will they be in?" she asked.

"Oh, a matter of an hour or thereabouts, if the wind holds from the north."

"And John's leading them home?"

Neil smiled to her. "Aye, he's glad of the gale, I doubt not, that's sending him back to you. He was loath to leave you this last time. I could see that plain."

A gust of wind and rain shook the house. Lysette left the window and went quickly to the settle.

"Where's the mother?" Neil asked.

"She's gone out with Parson. Someone's ill."

"And Judith? She's out too?"

"She went to see if you were in. You didn't meet her?"

He shook his head. "No, I landed under

the lee of the cliff. 'Twas hard rowin' in the wind."

"She'll miss your boat, Neil, and think you still out at the light!"

"No," he laughed, "there's plenty to tell her I'm in."

Lysette shrank herself together as the house shook with the swirl of the north wind diving down the cliff's edge with a shriek of mischief.

" 'Tis nothing," Neil said soothingly. "No worse, I dare say, than the storms you had at your own home."

She looked up quickly. "My own home?"

Neil watched her, fascinated by the faraway look and the changes her thoughts drove across her face.

"It seems like another life," she said after a while. "Sometimes as I sit here, with you at work somewhere and John out there on the sea . . . I can't believe that the girl I used to be ever lived at all. I think of my old self just as you'd think of a stranger . . . and of my old life as a half-forgotten dream." She was smiling as at an absurdity.

"Tell me about it," Neil said. "You've never told me——" He stopped, fearing to bring the look he dreaded into her eyes. A look she'd shown him once or twice in the first months of her life on the Island, when he'd asked her of

her home and people. Then she had looked at him wide-eyed and made no reply to his questions. Now, however, she seemed not to mind the recollections his questions brought, for she still smiled dreamily.

"I was never afraid there," she said. "It was all so gay, always so many people about, and the streets crowded with shoppers. And nearly always someone in to supper. And when I was at home from school I went to parties and dances and spent my time thinking of nothing but my gowns and how to fix my hair and rubbing my cheeks to bring them more color—heavens!" she laughed a rippling trill that brought Neil's laugh. "My father was old," she went on, "and we were alone. Mother—I don't know, but I think she died when I was a baby. But he spoiled me, everyone said. In his big house I was queen." She stopped speaking and looked up at him half laughing.

"Go on," he said eagerly, seating himself at her feet, "I like to hear—I like to think of you there like a—a queen. Tell me more!"

"More?" Her face clouded. "There's no more—only what you know. I met John—he used to stay at my father's house while I was at the convent, and when I came home he stayed near at one of the neighbors' when he was there."

"And you loved him and came away from all that with him?"

Lysette looked at him long before she answered.

"Yes, I came away from all that with him. For a time I wouldn't come. I told him, I told myself, that nothing could ever make me, and—my father told him. But John only laughed at me and refused to listen to father—and—and here I am!" She bowed her head against her breast and strained locked hands between her knees as the tears fell slowly.

Neil looked away from her, cursing the stupidity that had led him to ask her about her life.

Presently she said: "Neil, read to me, I don't want to think, I mustn't think any more today. Read to me."

"What shall I read, Madonna?" he asked, with difficulty steadying his voice.

"Something that will not make me afraid," she said, trying to smile.

He went to the bookshelves and looked over volume after volume. But he was not seeing the books. He was wondering what made Lysette unhappy; wondering if she were afraid of Judith; afraid that Judith would take her John from her. He knew that Judith's interest in John's life was a strong magnet to John's interest in himself. And he knew, too, that when

John talked of his work and his adventures at sea to Judith, he did it because he realized that Lysette could understand very little of his work or life, but he forgot that Lysette might wish to learn from him. It was enough to make her unhappy, Neil thought bitterly. How could she help but fear the strong, handsome woman who understood John and John's interests? And he wondered how much or how little of this John himself realized—and if he were really cruel. But he dismissed the thought as unfair, and determined anew to warn him. And, too, he felt a keen resentment toward Judith that she was, no matter how unintentionally—if it was unintentionally—the cause of suffering to Lysette. He would speak to her, perhaps; suggest that her feeling for John was too apparent.

He read from his own poems, and bits here and there from the Moderns:

"'Tis the clear light of love I praise
That steadfast gloweth o'er deep waters . . .
. . . . . .
Although the clouded storm dismays
Many a heart upon these waters,
The thought of that far golden blaze
Giveth me heart upon the waters,
Thinking thereof my bark is led
To port wherein no storm I dread;
No tempest maketh me afraid."

Lysette started at the sound of a footstep,

and turned toward the window, listening, then quickly rose and went out of the room. Neil watched her go, troubled by her manner. He picked up the light scarf she had dropped in her haste and stood for some moments regarding it, oblivious to the noise of the wind and occasional sharp swish of rain like spray dashed hissing upon the deck of a vessel.

Judith came in and saw him, saw him press the scarf to his face and heard him groan. She laughed quietly and began to take off her heavy coat. At her laugh Neil wheeled and stared at her stupidly.

"Judith!" he stammered.

"Neil!" Judith imitated his tone, and laughed again.

He stuffed the scarf into his pocket, hardly knowing what he did, and stood still, his thoughts confused. Judith took off her coat and shawl.

"Any news of th' fleet?" she asked him.

"They sh'd be roundin' the headland by now. Gale's drove 'em in——"

"He calls this a gale!" Judith said with good-natured contempt, and added as she hung up her coat: "John'll not be wi' th' fleet, then."

"And why not?" Neil asked.

"He'll not call it a gale yet awhile, I'm thinkin'," she answered, laughing.

"He's leadin' the fleet home."

Judith looked at him, surprised. "How do ye know that?"

"I left the lighthouse no more than an hour ago. Old Bruno had her in the glass."

"Old Bruno! An' ye'd trust old Bruno's eyesight?"

"And my own," Neil said absently.

Judith looked out of the window, her hands either side of her face. "Are ye sure, Neil?"

"Sure," he answered.

"Well, belike ye're right this time. John's not the man for work he once was."

"Aye, I'm thinkin' John'll not be goin' to sea much longer, Judith."

She came to the fire and spread out the wet shawl on a chair back.

"Ye think that, do ye? An' why, lad?"

"I think it," he repeated, hoping for it more than believing.

Judith gave an impatient shrug. "So she's softed him up to that, has she, wi' her fears an' her tears an' her tremblin's?"

"We can't all be strong like you an' John!" he said bitterly.

Judith leaned on the table between them and looked at him, her eyes mocking his vehemence. "No, ye can't," she agreed, "but there's no need to make th' strong like yerselves, is it?"

"There's some are too strong, Judith," he said, emphasizing his words with a look.

Judith straightened up and opened her eyes wide. "An' what does that mean, book reader?"

Neil turned away from her. "Maybe ye know what it means?"

She stepped to him and shook his sleeve. "Out wi' it, boy!"

But Neil's combative mood was spent. He muttered something about resistance and began poking the fire as though to end the discussion.

"So, that's what yer books have taught ye?" Judith laughed scornfully. "Nay, boy, God gives us our strength to use, not to waste."

Neil turned upon her angrily, all his combative mood returned and with interest. "God gives you no strength to take what belongs to another!" he cried at her, and as she stared, with heavy brows, went on—"Nor to hunger for it in your heart!"

"Ah-h," Judith said dangerously, "I see yer meanin', Neil lad! Ye dare preach at me because ye think I'm still lovin' John?"

"That ye can't help, maybe," Neil said more gently. But with a direct glance, he added—"But ye'd take him from Lysette."

She came close to him and looked down into his face, her eyes blazing with imprisoned fire.

"John belongs to Judith!" she said deliberately, "forever an' forever!"

Neil stared back at her, half frightened by her defiant words. "John belongs to Lysette," he said sternly, "and——" A wave of anger surged over him, of impotent rage, for the moment smothering him, and as it passed, leaving him weak and breathing hard, as though he'd actually been under water an instant too long. Tears sprang to his eyes. "Strength is hateful!" he cried, "it's the hateful thing that makes God terrible—it's the destroyer! How can anyone love strength? You can only be afraid of it. Just because she's not strong, you'd rob her of happiness, because she's not strong you'd destroy her! And John too, he'll kill her with his strength—strength is wicked—cruel!" His voice broke and he turned away with heaving shoulders.

Judith was not moved by his pain, she couldn't understand tears. With a quick reach she caught the scarf from his pocket and, stepping backward, held it high.

Neil made no attempt to regain it, he merely looked at her, his face twisting with the effort to control his tears.

Judith laughed and, pointing at him, whispered: "An' who loves Lysette? Neil! Ay," she went on, throwing the scarf to him, "some

be blind about here, but Judith's not one of them. Let's hear ye deny it."

"I've no need to deny it," he said more calmly, "my feelin's are my own, but you, Judith, the whole village knows you love John, and——"

"Ay, me," she cried, "I'm no sneaker behind books an' poetry when no one's about——"

"'Tis a lie!" Neil shouted at her, his face white with rage. "Whatever I——"

But she would not let him speak. "A lie, is it? An' what of the long days when John's at sea? What of the long nights for John's wife to think on Neil's soft ways and poetry book words?" She smiled ironically and shook her head. "Ah, boy, do ye think ye're hidin' yer feelin's? An' as for that poor little thing of straw an' tears, do ye think she can hide anything from me? Would ye have John come home to find his wife taken from him?"

"Judith!" Lysette cried from the doorway of her room, where she had been standing in the shadow for some minutes, "Judith, how dare you?"

But Judith paid no attention to her; she was saying what she had held under for months, and mingled with her contempt for their weakness was a feeling of real fear for these children, as she regarded them. She thought them weak

indeed, and had no idea of their reserves and inhibitions, credited them with no powers of resistance whatever, but chastised from the Olympian heights of her own battle and self-conquest.

"Ay," she went on, to Neil, "you an' the wife of John Strong love one another! You that's taken from John all yer life—to take the thing that's dearer than his own life to him. Deny it if ye can, either one of ye."

Neil spoke firmly. "I do deny it, Judith. Whatever's the case with me, Lysette loves only John——"

Judith's contemptuous laugh interrupted him, and when he spoke again his voice trembled with an intensity of passionate pleading that made Judith looked at him in amazed unbelief.

"It's true, I tell you!" he cried. "I've said no word that John mightn't have heard an' welcome — she's had no thought that John shouldn't have read and gladly! You must believe that, Judith—you must! Not one thought in her heart. As for me, if what God knows I couldn't help feeling—has come to me—I'll pay for it all my life. I'm going away from here, Judith, after what you've said—how you've put things wrong—I can't stay——"

"Neil!" Lysette cried. "No, no, no! You mustn't leave me here alone! You don't mean it, Neil—tell me you don't mean it! You can't

—I won't let you go—Neil." She went to him.

"No thought in her heart?" Judith smiled and turned to go to the kitchen. She had begun to feel the poet's pain and a little her own cruelty. "Take warnin', boy!—Ah!"

Lysette swayed and crumpled in a heap on the floor. Judith picked her up and laid her on the settle. "Get water, Neil—hurry, lad!" she cried at him as he stood staring with a face of tragic bewilderment. Then she took the vinegar bottle from a shelf and moistened her handkerchief. "Where's Elspeth?" she asked when Neil had returned with the dipper of water.

"She was gone out when I came in," he answered.

"She's not back from Mrs. Rorth's then. I'll go to her. She'll be wantin' to know the fleet's sighted."

"No, no, Judith, don't go!" Neil begged in alarm.

Judith, bending over Lysette, laughed reassuringly. "She's comin' round. No need to make a fuss."

But the poet was more deeply wounded than she imagined. "Judith," he pleaded, twisting his hands together, and looking at Lysette's white face, "what for have you done this thing? A minute ago I was a man fightin' for God's way—and now—now——"

Judith put her hand on his arm. "Neil, ye're a fool. Who started it?"

He looked at her wonderingly, then as realization dawned on him he hung his head. She pointed to Lysette, who was trying to sit up, then she left the room.

Lysette came to slowly. "Neil," she whispered, "it isn't true? You won't leave me alone?"

"Madonna!" he murmured anxiously.

"No, no, Neil," she wept. "Do you want to kill me? Do you want me to die?"

"Hush, hush, Lysette! Neil would crucify his own soul to save you pain. But—I can't stay, after what Judith said—you know now—and—I can't, I can't——"

"Neil," she said steadily, "if you go I'll kill myself! What sin is there in our love? Haven't I been punished enough without you leaving me alone?"

"Punished?"

"Yes, punished! Was it my fault I married John? He's so strong—I said no to him a hundred times, but he wouldn't take no. He only laughed and came again and again, defying my father—defying everyone. He made me!"

Neil stood back from her.

"Lysette—you mean you never loved John?"

"Loved him!" she cried, turning her head

from side to side. "I was a child—brought up in a convent. I knew nothing of life—I knew nothing of the meaning of love. John was strong and good and splendid—and I thought of him as of a king—I had no will of my own when he was there—but love—Oh, Neil, Neil——"

In great distress he knelt by her again. "Hush, madonna, hush. You must not say such things to me!"

"You won't go?" She sat up, clutching his sleeve. "Promise!"

Judith came in from the kitchen. "Elspeth's not in, yet?" she asked. "I'll go fetch her. Th' gale's makin' up. She'll never walk alone in this wind."

She stood at the window putting on her coat and peering out.

"Ah, th' fleet's in. I can see them roundin' the Rock."

The door flew open with a swirl of wind and John stepped inside. Lysette stood up, gasping —"John!" and swayed toward him. He leaped to her and caught her in his arms.

"Lysette!" he cried, "what's it? What's it, my precious? Mother! Mother!"

Judith shut the door, and said: "Lay her down, John. She needs to lay flat."

"Eh?" he said stupidly. But at Judith's insistent words, he put Lysette on the settle again.

"What's wrong, lad?" he asked Neil. "What makes her sick? Where's mother?"

Neil spoke with an effort. "Down to Mrs. Rorth's, I think. You're ahead of the fleet, John——"

"Mrs. Rorth's? Why bain't she here? I'll go fetch her."

Judith motioned to Neil to go. "No, no, John, let the lad go. You should stay here."

"There's a power o' wind blowin'," John said. "Mother'll be needin' a strong hand up the hill."

"Your place is here," Judith said seriously.

"She's right," John said to Neil. "My place is here. An' bring Parson with ye. Belike we'll need his doctorin'."

Neil got his coat and hat, watching Lysette as he put them on. She seemed to him a mere shadow of mist against his brother's huge form, and he wondered that neither John nor Judith had the sense to see that she was getting soaked with the dampness from John's coat.

Lysette read his thought, for with a little laugh she pushed John away from her. "You're wet," she said.

"I'll send him with mother," Neil said in reply to John's words.

John took off his coat and went to the door to close it after Neil. "Then come back to me,"

he said. "I've some business to talk over with ye. The catch is to be sold, and I'll let you 'tend to it. I'll do nothing now but look after her."

"I can't do it for you, John," Neil said unsteadily.

John frowned and spoke sharply. "What? Don't stand there talkin'! Go for Parson an' mother, then come back to me, as I tell ye."

He opened the door and pushed Neil out, closing it with his shoulder as the wind swept into the room, blowing out the lamp. "Wind's shiftin'," he muttered. To Judith he said: "What ails the lad, Judith?"

Judith lighted the lamp again before she answered.

"His soul's sick."

John stood by the settle and looked down at Lysette. "What's that, 'his soul's sick'? Don't talk like Parson, Judith. I don't get such talk."

Judith, standing by him, made a gesture of impatience. "Ask him yerself. I'm goin'."

"Goin'? In this storm?"

"I've been out in worse," she laughed.

"No, no, Judith. Wait till mother gets here. Ye may be needed."

"No, I'll not be needed." She looked at Lysette. "She's all right." She began to put her coat on again.

John reached out to stop her but she pulled away from him.

"Stay, Judith," he said again, "I'm no hand at nursin', it needs a woman's wit."

" 'Tis no nursin' needed, but a little sense," she said.

He took the coat from her and laid it aside.

"Come," he said, "something's wrong, I can see that; what is it, Judith?"

Judith made a movement of her head in Lysette's direction. John turned and saw her sitting up. He went back to her and sat down by her, putting his arm about her shoulders.

"What's wrong is with you, John," then, with a forced mischievousness: "Yer brain is all gone to muscle, I'm thinkin'."

John turned and looked at her over his shoulder.

"Don't tease girl," he said, "answer straight."

Judith nodded toward Lysette. "Yon's a lonely bird, nor ever should be a fisherman's wife."

"Never ye mind, doveling," he said to Lysette tenderly, "John'll be givin' up the sea soon enough now."

Judith sat on Lysette's other side and chafed her hands.

"Aye, ye'd make a great fireside man, John.

An' what'll ye be doin' wi' yerself day in an' day out? I'm thinkin' God was short o' the gray matter when he screwed the head on yer shoulders, John. Should ye look inside some time, ye'll likely find it full of—nothin'."

"Let be, Judith," John said good-naturedly, "I mean what I say. Lysette needs John, eh, my pigeon?"

"An' Tom Rorth to take th' lead, while John Strong hugs the chimney side!" Judith laughed. Her tone was light but her heart was heavy with foreboding.

John's eyes lighted at mention of his rival.

"Ah, Tom Rorth—poor Tom!" he said, laughing now himself, "we outpointed him again and led the *Petrel* by four mile an' more, on the run home." He rose and took his pipe from the mantel. "Tom'll be in a rare rage with me this night. I'd a mind to gi' up the sea for some time now, so I bedevilled poor Tom to th' limit of his patience this catch. We cut in on him at every occasion an' we carry a thousan' poun' more fish in our well, at that!"

Judith laughed appreciatively. "Tom'll never forgive ye, John. He's more sore every time ye outwit him."

"Nay, Tom's a true man," John said, shaking his head. "He loves you, Judith, why don't ye take him?"

Judith got up and took the shawl from the chair back and put it about her head. John saw that he had offended and quickly took up his tale again.

"Tom was th' weather side th' fleet. He'd been manoeuverin' for it all day, since th' wind freshened, an' when it shifted to th' west, all knew we'd best make harbor. So I held th' wheel up till the whole fleet was past save the *Petrel.* Poor Tom was sore puzzled. He was watchin' for a trick, but we outmanoeuvered him, trick or no trick."

Judith leaned against the table and listened. John went round and drew diagrams on the cloth as he talked.

"Just as he thought he was safe I pulled up across his bow there, an' sent him about, blanketted him an' had him weathered before he knew what I was up to; then to cap the trick —the *Petrel* was here, see? an' we here—I druv him into the North Current by holdin' him off the wind. Th' *Elspeth,* bein' heavier, fetched round wi' the tide—Tom's own trick! He tried it too, but too late, for the chop had his bow. We could hear him curse as he fought to keep the *Petrel's* head up. We sighted him four mile astern just as we passed th' Graveyard Lightship."

"Tom'll have to make a power o' talk to live

that down!" Judith laughed, "he with his tricks!"

John laughed heartily and struck the table a blow with his open hand.

"Aye, a trick he learned sailorin' in the tropics, he said. He'll not be so proud of his heathen practices now, maybe."

He turned suddenly to Lysette. "Do ye get th' lay, my pigeon?"

"No, John," she said, shaking her head and looking at him with a twisted little smile that smote him.

"I'm a great fool to be tellin' it so in sea talk!" he cried. "See, I'll explain it to you."

He went to the hearth and took a handful of sticks from the wood box. "Ye see—here's the *Elspeth,* an' here's Tom Rorth's boat, an' here's th' headland. Th' fleet's here——" He looked at her and saw that she was not following him. He stood up. " 'Tis a shame me botherin' you with talk of th' boats an' such. You're not feelin' well, are ye, my pigeon?"

Lysette did not answer. John looked round at Judith, appealing to her with his eyes, but she was watching Lysette. He frowned.

"What's it?" he asked. "Are ye sick?"

Lysette rose and turned to him. She began to speak, but hardly murmured, then with a quick

birdlike movement turned and almost ran out of the room.

John took a step to follow her. "Lysette!" he called. But Judith stopped him. "Let be, John," she said sharply, "a woman should be alone an' she wants it."

"But Judith, I've just come home," he said.

"It's time, I'm thinkin'," Judith muttered, and turned to get her coat. But John stood in front of it.

"What do ye mean by that?" he asked.

"Nothin'," she said. "Give me my coat."

He made no movement. "Ye've no idle tongue in yer head, Judith, to mean nothin' by what ye say. Somewhat's wrong here. I sense th' feel of 't in the air. What is it?"

Judith looked at him while she wondered what to tell him. Knowing full well that the truth would wreck him—wreck them all, indeed—she thought best to give him half truth. She would tell him that he had yet to win his wife.

"John, can ye bear the truth?" she asked.

"I can bear nothing else," he said decidedly, a look of fear gathering like clouds over the clarity of his eyes.

Judith stepped toward him, but stopped, listening. She turned away. "There's Elspeth and Parson," she said.

He went to the door and held it waiting for

them. With the touch of Parson's hand on the latch, John opened, and let them in, closing the door again with an effort. He took Elspeth in his arms.

"Mother, ye're fair blowed," he said, smiling as he felt her heavy breathing. "Eh, Parson, I'm glad to see you, too."

"It'll be a wild night," Parson said, taking John's outstretched hand, "th' wind's shifted to th' west again."

Judith, helping Elspeth with her coat, whispered: "Don't let him worry her. She's needin' to be alone for a time."

Elspeth nodded her understanding and rose to go to the fire.

John looked at his mother while he answered Parson's remark. "Aye, I was lookin' for that. Will ye see after Lysette, mother? She's all strange." He looked at Parson: "Or sick, maybe?"

Elspeth, warming her feet at the fire, said: "Ye frightened her most likely, John."

"What's to frighten a wife at seein' her man after a long trip?" John asked, a touch of impatience in his voice.

"She's a very delicate piece, son," Elspeth said. "We should remember her condition."

"Go to her, mother."

"Aye, I'm goin' to her, John! But let a body

get her breath. 'Tis a climb up th' hill against that wind. Get the fire up in the shed, Judith, I'm thinkin' maybe we'll be needin' it."

"Ye'll be needin' nothin', she's not sick," Judith said.

"Never mind. 'Tis best to be prepared," Elspeth insisted, going out of the room and beckoning Judith with a nod of her head.

"What's wrong with 'em all," John asked, half amused, half angry, "ye'd think I was some offender caught red-handed, instead of a man returned from the dangers of the sea."

Parson, standing back to the fire and twisting round to fill his pipe from the tobacco jar on the shelf, shook his head. "Ye must be patient wi' 'em, John. Ye know very little of human nature."

"Human nature? What's that to do with it, Parson?" John asked, filling his own pipe.

"Much, John, much. There's something else aside the body in people—even in women," Parson mumbled between puffs, a twinkle lighting his eyes.

John took the taper from Parson's hand and lighted his pipe before he spoke again. "An' what do ye mean by that? Can't ye speak plain, sir? I'm no duller than th' rest, but I've no manner of understandin' what's all th' to-do!"

"Aye, ye're not as dull as the rest, John,"

Parson said regretfully, "far from it. That's it —ye're as God meant a man should be—save only in one thing."

"Don't bring that up now, Parson, please. 'Tis useless, as ye know."

"If that's useless, John, all is useless."

"No, no," John made a gesture of denial. "Ye're a physician of bodies as well as of souls. Ye can't deny that."

"I've no wish to deny it, man. But this is no need for physicians. 'Tis need only for prayers."

"Prayers!" John's tone was weary. "I've yet to see th' time prayers could save a man from aught. An' I've seen more'n one good ship go down wi' every soul on board, an' all prayin' for mercy—aside from those that prayed ashore. Ye've seen it yerself."

"The ways of God are past findin', John, but in denyin' God ye're denyin' th' only refuge of th' soul. An' I'm tellin' ye for the last time God will punish ye for yer obstinacy."

John laughed good-naturedly. "Not for the last time, Parson. Say for the thousan'th time. But there'll be a thousan' more, I'm thinkin'."

"There'll be no need, I'm thinkin'," Parson said, watching the smoke from his pipe curl and waver in the draught, then suddenly, like a live thing, dive and swirl up the chimney.

"No more riddles, Parson," John begged. "Speak plain to a man."

"I can speak no plainer than God has already spoken to you, my son," Parson replied.

John laughed shortly. "God?" he said. "I've heard no God speakin'. But maybe He spoke in riddles, too?"

Parson shook his pipe, almost shouting—his words tumbling out in a rush as his anger got the better of his discretion. "Is it a riddle," he cried, "that ye've got everything yer heart longed for? Is it a riddle that ye're the richest man in th' Islands? That ye're the head in all councils, an' you not yet forty? That ye've the best an' fastest boat in th' fleet? That ye're still young an' strong an' have th' woman of yer choice for wife? That ye're soon to be a father? Where's the riddle in that, man?" He was out of breath with his vehemence. But John made no reply. He seemed to be thinking.

Parson turned back to the fire and said more calmly: "All this ye've got an' much more, an' still ye deny God."

There was a long pause before John spoke, and when he did it was with obvious restraint, and careful choice of words.

"I deny naught," he said, "an' I ask for naught. I'm satisfied with things as they are. An' if I wasn't I'd make my own fight to change

them, askin' no favors an' givin' none, an' prayin' for no miracles. My wife's sick, an' you are a physician. I am askin' ye for th' skill ye've learnt from books wrote by mortal hands. If she be dangerous sick, an' ye can do nothin' for her, I'm prepared to take what comes, as a man should, since death must come to all alike."

Parson shook his head sadly, as he knocked his pipe out against the chimney board. "She's not dangerous sick, John. There's no fear for Lysette more than for another. Her I can help, I've little doubt of that. But you, John—my heart is sore for you."

"Thank ye, sir," John said heartily. "I understand ye would do me nothin' but good. If I spoke harshly, I meant no offense."

Judith came into the room and made a motion of her head toward Lysette's door.

"Well," Parson said with a sigh, "since I've failed in bringin' help to a sick soul, I'll see what I can do for a sick body."

John watched him go and then turned to see Judith take up her coat.

"Ye're not goin', Judith," he said, a note of pleading in his voice.

"Ay," she said, "I'm best away."

She'd had time to think of what she had intended telling him, and had come to the con-

clusion that he'd be better for finding it out for himself.

A feeling of strangeness came over John. He was not used to equivocation, silences and half-truths. He stepped up to her and took her coat sharply and threw it behind him. "What's wrong here, Judith?" he demanded. "You asked me, a while back, if I could bear th' truth. Well, give it to me."

"You couldn't, John," she said, angry with him for his high-handed manner. "I'm goin'." She turned toward the door, disdaining to fight him for her coat.

He stepped in front of her. "Not till ye tell me," he said.

The blood mounted to her temples. "I'm goin', I say! Else the storm'll break me! It's blowin' up since th' wind shifted."

"I'll see that ye get home, all right," he said quietly. "Come, what's it?"

"Let me by, John!" she cried angrily. "Judith'll not be stopped by your orders!"

"Judith'll stop till I hear th' truth, whatever it be," he said, taking her by the wrists as she tried to push past him.

She struggled fiercely for a moment, then suddenly relaxing she stooped her head and kissed his hands, and falling to her knees, as he released her with a cry of protest, she clasped his

body and pressed her face against him, murmuring: "John! John! John!"

Horrified, he broke from her and fell back against the door. The flame that shot through his heart and brain at her clasp frightened him to panic. He went white. "Judith!" he cried hoarsely, "what do ye mean by such a thing?"

Judith leaped to her feet, covering her face with an arm, and crying: "Let me go! Let me go!"

He put out his hand to steady her. "Hush! ye'll be heard!" he commanded.

But Judith was beside herself with rage, with mortification, with passion, self-pity—all the pent-up longings and protests of her elemental heart.

"Why should I hush?" she stormed at him. " 'Tis yer own fault! How dare ye use yer strength on me like that?" She shuddered as she looked at the marks of his powerful hands on her wrists, then passionately kissed them, and held out her arms to him. "John, I love ye!" she moaned.

"Judith!" John said, sternly, "stop. It can't be——"

"Would to God it couldn't," she interrupted him, "but it is, John. Ever since——"

"Stop, I say! Make no shameful confession in this house——"

"Shameful?" Judith took a step backward, and repeated: "Shameful?"

John struck his hands together. That "shameful" had steadied him, like a wall to lean on. "No wonder there's some'at wrong in this house," he said angrily. "No wonder my wife's afraid of me!" He turned upon Judith violently. "What have ye been tellin' her? Eh?"

But Judith was too shocked by his rage and her own breakdown to understand his words. He stepped close to her. "Answer me!" he said.

She only covered her face again with her arm and moaned: "Oh, John, I couldn't help it. So long as ye treated me fair I was myself, but at the feel of yer great muscles——" She put out a hand to him in agonized appeal, but he struck it aside. "Stop, I tell ye," he said under his breath. "Have ye no shame, then? Leave this house. Ye're not fit to stay under the same roof with that white angel——"

Judith gasped shrilly: "White angel? Lysette a white angel?"

John held the door open, while the wind shrieked and tore at the room and swung the lamp to and fro, the place alternately light and dark.

"Go, I say. An' leave that pure name off your lips," he ordered, his voice trembling with

the suppression he was forcing himself to undergo.

"Ye blind fool!" Judith whispered, "ye said be could bear the truth—well, hear it then——"

"Ye've not the truth in ye. Go, before I'm tempted to lay my hands on ye in earnest."

"So!" she cried, stepping toward the door, "John's a coward! Ye're afraid of the truth, after all!"

He shut the door with a bang and looked at her, weighing her words. "Out wi' it, then," he said between his teeth, "I'm no patient man, as ye know."

Judith turned and, pointing toward Lysette's door, said deliberately: "Lysette and Neil—love one another!"

It took him several seconds to fully comprehend the significance of her words. But when at last he did comprehend, unaccountably, even to himself, he believed her. Then with an effort of will he put the thing from him.

"It's a lie," he said quietly.

But Judith, watching his face, saw belief, and the repudiation of it. "Ask Neil," she said in a strained voice.

"Neil?" he repeated stupidly.

"Ask yer white angel!"

John's face darkened, and for the tiniest part of a second, Judith saw death in his eyes. But

undaunted, she cried at him: "Ye boast ye have no fear of the truth. Seek it then. Ask him—ask her. Are ye afraid?"

John strode to Lysette's door. "Parson!" he shouted.

"Ay," Parson answered.

"Come out here," John ordered, peremptorily.

Parson came into the room and closed the door after him.

"Where's Neil?" John asked.

Parson saw the look on John's face and thought to gain time. "I don't know."

"Didn't he come to your house to tell you I wanted ye?"

"He did, but he was gone again before I could ask a question."

"I told him I had need of him, that he was to come back with you an' mother."

Judith laughed shortly.

Parson looked at her and was struck with her appearance. She was standing erect looking at John with a kind of devilish light in her eyes, her face mottled with color and her bosom heaving convulsively. She was beside herself, unnerved, distraught; her self-control, self-possession gone. Barriers down and no strength or mind left her to build them up again in time—Elemental.

"Is it safe for me to leave Lysette?" John asked Parson.

"Safe? Surely there's nothin' wrong wi' Lysette. Only nervous an' excited. A little frightened by th' storm, likely. But what's all this noise about, son?"

As John turned to take his cap from its peg his mother and Lysette came into the room.

"Where be ye goin', John?" Elspeth asked, startled by his manner.

"Neil," John said, his voice shaken with passion, "I'll find him."

"What is it, man?" Parson demanded, looking from John to Judith and back to John again. But Elspeth sensed John's rage and rushed to him. "John," she said, "ye shan't go after Neil in a temper! What's come over ye?"

John took her by the shoulders and put her aside. "Let be, mother," he said, and strode toward the door.

"Parson—Parson!" Elspeth cried in fear, clutching at John's coat.

Lysette went toward them and put her hand on John's arm. He turned to loosen Elspeth's hands and heard Judith say: "White angel!"

John broke from the two women to see Parson standing with back to the door. He laughed harshly. 'Am I to be baited in my own house?"

he said, steadily enough. "Come, Parson, I'm in no mood to talk. Out of my way!"

"Let me go an' fetch him, John," Parson said quietly. "I know where——" His words were drowned in the sudden thunder of heavy blows on the door, and, startled, he leaped aside as it swung open and three men crowded into the room. They were Harrod and Malcolm and a lad from John's crew.

"We're launchin' th' lifeboat, John," Harrod said as soon as the door was shut.

"I'll not go." John turned away from the men and, leaning against the table, looked at Lysette.

The men seemed at a loss, then Harrod said: "We're needin' ye for the scull, man."

"Take Tom Rorth," John said impatiently, "I have business here."

"Buznuz mus' wait, John," Malcolm said with his Scotch drawl. "There's a boat smasht on Gaul Rahk."

"Take Tom Rorth, I say, or Long Jim Fein. I'll not go," John said, a note of finality in his voice. He was wondering why these men were standing there together baiting him like the rest, when he had work to do. That sudden feeling of strangeness, of unreality, came over him again.

His lad spoke now. "Last heard, Tom Rorth's

schooner was lyin' to under th' lee of t' headland. Got caught in th' ebb tide afore th' wind shifted. He's like to lose his life as 'tis."

"It may be Tom hisself," Judith taunted him. "Belike th' *Petrel's* foundered an' Tom an' th' crew's took to th' boats."

"God save us!" Elspeth muttered. But John said nothing.

" 'Twas you drove him into th' North Current," Judith reminded him.

"John, ye must go," Parson said, "there's no other——"

"I'll not, I say," John said, still quietly. "Take Long Jim."

Harrod went over to John and stood squarely in front of him. By this everyone in the room had begun to wonder. "Long Jim's no steady enough for this job. We've got to pull straight into th' teeth o' th' gale. 'Twon't do to delay, every minute counts—'tis like to be th' death of us all as 'tis."

John made no movement and said nothing.

Parson went to the table and struck it with his fist. "God calls ye, John, beware how ye tempt His wrath!"

John laughed, throwing back his head. " 'Tis an artful God ye worship, Parson, to make it Tom Rorth. But if that's who 'tis, it's little danger he's in. Tom's a strong man and can

weather this blow. I'll not go, an' there's an end!" He took off his cap and slammed it on the table.

Harrod turned away and made a signal to Malcolm. The other took a step toward John and said grimly:

"Nerve yersel', Jahn Strahng." And slipping his hand from under his coat he held up a piece of white wood, blue lettered, with the word DREAM. "Neil's starnboard," he said.

John leaped forward and caught the board from Harrod's hand, staring at it while Harrod went on: "Neil started for th' light soon after th' fleet anchored. Th' bay was like a pond then, but th' shift o' th' wind caught him outside th' rock. He made a good fight of 't, but——"

Elspeth's cries cut him short. Judith caught her shoulders and held her tight.

"Your trial has come, John, as I told ye it would," Parson said sternly, but with a note of exultation in his voice. "Are ye afraid after all?"

John tossed the board he held into the fire.

"If it be God's work," he said angrily, " 'tis a judgment on Neil. Let him reap his reward."

He turned his eyes on Lysette and saw her face tortured out of recognition. But Elspeth

broke away from Judith's arms and threw herself at her son's feet.

"No, no!" she cried. "John, God gave ye all—health, strength, and fine looks—an' Neil He gave so little——" Her voice gave out and she fell prone, sobbing, "Neil, my boy, my baby—my baby——"

Judith cried, "John, they'll say ye were afraid!"

"Let 'em say it," he answered and turned as Lysette came toward him. "John," she said in a voice as cold as his own, "Neil's out there—you must save him."

He bent toward her. "You ask me that?"

"Yes."

"Ye heard these lads say the crew that ventured out would likely venture to their death?"

"I heard."

"An' you ask me to go—for him?" His tone was incredulous.

"Yes!" she cried, "yes!"

John drew back from her, livid, his last doubt dissipated.

"Art comin', John, or do we go alone?" Harrod asked impatiently.

"Will ye defy the Lord God, John Strong?" Parson demanded, catching Malcolm's arm before he could open the door.

John looked round at the old man with a

sudden light in his eyes. Was Parson right? Was he called to fight, after all? And it struck him with force that his life had crumbled like a house of cards about his ears—his wife unfaithful, his brother a traitor, Judith—! He snatched his cap from the table. Judith stood by, holding the heavy twelve-foot steering scull that none but John could wield. With a swift strike he took the oar and glowered into her deep eyes, then, head up—"Aye," he said, "I do defy Him!" Striding to the door he flung it open and went out, followed by the three who had come for him, and by Parson, who meant that no man should go to danger that he himself shirked. Too, back of that determination was a feeling that when the brothers were face to face there might be the need of a sacrificial arm between them.

The night was black and only an occasional glare of distant lightning made Gull Rock visible through the thinning rain. As John came out on the beach where the boat waited, he looked seaward and saw a figure clinging to the topmost jag of the rock, covered almost constantly in smothering spray.

He threw his shoulder against the boat's stern and shouted his orders. The men took hold and the boat shot out into the low surf. But Harrod had said true. They rowed into the teeth

of the sou'west gale, blowing up to sixty miles by this, and when they got beyond the inner bay the surge struck them with a roar as of battle. It was a fight. Parson, at John's side, tried to pray, but could think only of those terrifying words—"Aye, I do defy Him!"

In the headland cottage the women waited.

The mother sat huddled near the chimney, motionless, silent, save now and again a low moan and a side rocking of her head. Beside her the wife stood, her hand on the old woman's shoulder, her eyes on Judith; steady, apparently unwinking. Her pale face was calm and her soft childish lips moved constantly in prayer.

Judith wandered about the room like one in a stupor. Her arms crossed, hands clasping her shoulders and head bent, she never left off her uneven stride until after full three hours of it, she heard the sound of men's boots crunching the shell path outside the cottage. Then with a spring she was at the door and had it open.

Parson stepped inside and closed the door, holding it with his right hand while he lifted the left and said hoarsely:

"God's will be done."

Elspeth, staggering to her feet, muttered: "Amen!"

Parson opened the door again and four men entered carrying a stretcher.

Judith caught Elspeth round the body as she staggered to the table where the men had laid their burden.

"Neil!" the mother sobbed.

Parson, tearing at the boy's clothing, cried: "Hot water there—brandy! Brandy, I say! There's a life to be saved here. Harrod, take off those boots, brandy, brandy, I say—there's a life to be saved, I tell ye—look alive, my children!" He held Neil's head up and poured brandy down his throat. "Heat a blanket, Judith."

Neil, by this, stripped of his clothes and almost dry from the hard hands which chafed his cold body, began to move his head from side to side, moaning.

"He's livin'!" Judith whispered.

"O' course he's livin'!" Parson said. "Look at the red blood comin' under our hands here. Aye, he'll do . . . . Bring him to the fire, men. Here, Judith, that blanket . . . . So-o."

"Where's John?" Judith asked suddenly.

Parson stood up. "John's gone," he said quietly. And as the three women stared at him, uncomprehending, he went on, speaking rapidly. "Hark ye, mother of a brave man. We was manoeuverin' t' windward of th' rock to give

us a chance to land Neil th' lifeline. John shouts to me to take th' scull—and sudden as a harpoon strikin', he was overboard wi' th' line in his teeth, sea boots an' all, in that ragin' sea. While we was cryin' to him to come back, an' payin' out the line, he swims to th' rock —has Neil tied secure about th' middle an' wi' a heave of his great shoulders sends him into the waves. Then wi'out waitin' for th' line, all his clothes still on him, he dives. It was a great sight! I've never seen a finer." He looked to the men to confirm his admiration, then drooping his shoulders with a sudden weariness, he said: "We stood by for near an hour, to stay longer would ha' been to lose—both."

Parson was something of a psychologist. He felt the need of these women as he had never before felt human need, and in his very effort to save them he broke his own strength. Raising his hands and looking upward in accustomed appeal to God, he began: "The Lord gave, the Lord taketh——" but his fortitude failed him and he sank on his knees, crying in bitter agony —"Oh my God, Thou chastiseth me! My God, have I not been faithful? Thou chastiseth me, O my God!"

Lysette went to him and, stooping, took his head in her arms and knelt by him.

Judith rose from the hearth where she had

been supporting Elspeth, stood a moment or two, her head thrown back as though listening, and then, with a swift stride, crossed to the door and went out into the storm.

When John rose after his dive from the Rock, he looked about for the lifeboat, but he could not make her out in the black night. He waited interminably for the lightning and, when it came, cursed its brevity and distance, which prevented his seeing anything but the heave of the hissing sea and the dull glitter of the rain. He was to leeward of the Rock and decided he must get into the open for a glance around. But first his coat and boots must go.

He did not speculate now on the metaphysical aspect of his position, but gave all his attention to the natural. And by the time he had accomplished that most difficult of feats—the removal of sea boots under water—he knew that his was to be a battle for life. His objective mind, used to command, to quick decisions, to discipline and to danger, looked no farther ahead than to the next stroke of his powerful arms. Nor back at all. He knew too well the function of the lifeboat and the integrity of the men on whom his life depended, to waste a moment's

thought on either. Sight—light was his need. Twice he caught a glimpse of the boat—thought he had—but the flashes of lightning on which he had to depend were so faint and far between that he could not be sure. The rain had increased in density, too, and when he finally turned to seek rest in the lee of the Rock, he could not make it out. He gave up now to the simple effort to keep his head above water, while conserving his strength to the utmost.

Once, in a more brilliant flash, he got a sight of the Rock far away—a quarter of a mile, he judged—and he concluded he'd been caught in the flood tide sweep, which ought to swing him round toward the headland. Some time afterward as he rose on the crest of a wave he saw plainly the east windows of his home, glowing orange through the rain. This gave him his bearings, and he turned obliquely toward the land and began to swim again for the outer bight, which if the wind still held southwest would give him the chance of a landing.

Time had ceased for him. His command of mind and muscle began to fluctuate. He looked forward—his teeth ground together and his muscles tautened. Instinctively he saved himself for the last—the supreme effort. "The hollow of God's hand" he'd heard the sea called, and now the phrase came to him, recurring in-

sistently. He judged his strength deliberately; weighed his chances and knew his battle depended solely on his ability to keep his direction . . .remembered the back current and calculated its increase with the gale . . . . Was the wind still southwest? If not . . . .

Something struck him on the right shoulder, a paralyzing blow. Again, his hand was caught and held an instant—then in the glare of a blinding flash of light he saw Gull Rock not two hundred yards away. The shock of what this meant to his chances was driven from his mind by the sight of something floating almost within reach of his hands. He clutched at it and dragged himself out of the water and rested, breathing hoarsely, gasping, his mind in confusion with the sudden relief from complete effort. In the next flash of lightning he recognized the taffrail and splintered counter of a vessel, and wondered vaguely if it were the *Petrel's*. He saw, too, other wreckage near and felt his legs crushed against the piece on which he lay. But his heart was beating with hope, and he began to take in the narrowness of his escape; to rejoice in the strength of his determinations, the consciousness that of all the men in the Islands he was probably the only one that could live through such an experience—trial—battle. Parson's words: "Are ye afraid,

after all?" seemed to come to him out of the night, and he answered them with a laugh. And while he lay resting and planning his course a crashing blow on his temple and another on his arm almost sent him overboard again. He turned, dazed, to ward the wreckage, but could see nothing in the utter darkness—nothing but the phosphorescent glow of mountains of water and now and again the immeasurable, the everlasting sea . . .

At dawn, the Revenue Cutter *Service* picked up a sailor clinging mightily to a bit of wreckage, though apparently dead, and bore him with all speed to the Marine Hospital at North Ledge.

CHAPTER X

Spring. Re-creation. Nature's anniverse reminder of the Life Eternal, of man's sure destiny, of God's incorrigible love.

It was the third since John Strong's ordeal by water. From the garden of the headland cottage, a garden filled of promise, vibrant with the waking life of earth, the sea spread its azure glory like heaven's blue floor dropped down. "And behold, decked in the hues of iris and gold, that gallant procession of cliffs like an army with banners zigzagging up from the world's rim . . . ." And all about, the south wind, the rustling leaves, the pale green of vine and stem and avalanches of pink and white blossoms.

In the midst of this so old—so new loveliness, hands clasped, head uplifted, eyes afar, Judith leaned against the cottage wall, and day-dreamed. All the familiar music of the awakening earth was in her ears. The droning of the bees, the piping birds, the whispering wind, the plashing of the waves, the far murmur of the village. And in the hammock nearby, asleep, John Strong's son. A sturdy boy, large boned and promising of a sturdy manhood.

Eyre had changed little in these years. Tom Rorth and Lisal were happily the parents of a daughter. Old Bruno had gone to a sailors' home on the mainland and Stork Harrod had taken his place at the lighthouse. David slept the long sleep in the little cemetery atop the western hill, and Malcolm had abdicated in favor of his four sons. Parson was a bit whiter, a bit slower, a bit more rigid, but not one bit less God's man. And this God of Parson's was still the jealous God of vengeance as He was still the gentle God of love—not to be questioned, judged or interpreted, but obeyed. And John Strong's loss had but confirmed this orthodox credo to adamant. He had prophesied it, warned of God's wrath, and in the dread punishment meted out to that defiant man, Parson comprehended the enormity of John's sin. There was nothing left to him, then, but—in violation of his every instinct of love—to tear the image of the offender from his sore heart and cast it from him forever.

Elspeth had aged greatly, as if twenty, instead of two and a half, years had passed over her. Her sight was all but gone and her hearing was little better. She had taken John's loss the harder in the guiltiness of her conscience. In those hours while she and Lysette and Judith had waited on that dreadful night,

Elspeth had suffered the tortures of a passionate hate as well as a passionate love. If John had come back without Neil alive and well his mother knew that never again could she have touched his hand or eaten of his providing. It was of his tyranny and egoism, this terrible thing that had come upon them. Whatever it was, she neither knew nor cared. What she knew was that Neil would never have attempted the long row in the teeth of that wind unless he'd been driven to it! And who but John could or would drive Neil? She had seen the light of anger in John's eyes as he spoke his brother's name, and from the tablets of her esoteric heart his mother had erased John's name.

When the event had called upon her to make atonement, all she could do was to suffer under the ineradicable certainty that John's life was not given for his brother, but lost in the effort to save Neil for his own vengeance. In the grip of this tragic error she had lived twice—thrice —ten times every hour of consciousness, and was just now beginning to shake off its terrifying clutch.

Judith had changed much, too, but subtly. She was less buxom, with finer lines to her figure and softer curves to her wide full lips. The deep corners smiled incessantly, if a little

sadly, and the old sullen droop was gone. In her sloe eyes was no longer flame, but a light, felt rather than seen. All arrogance had left her and in its place was a high humility which awed but did not entice.

Lysette's motherhood had brought her new energy and interest. And Neil, after months of illness, had recovered, to be another man than the purposeless youth he'd shown himself till then. He and Lysette were man and wife at last, and were spending their honeymoon at Judith's house in the village.

And it was of their marriage Judith was thinking. Of how suited were those two, Neil and Lysette. "Made for each other," she thought, "as John and me were made for each other." In every budding tree and flowering bush, in the mating birds and the industrious bees, Judith saw Nature's fulfillment. And in the sleeping boy there, her own barrenness. But, O compensation! He was not hers, but he was John's! Flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone—and in that alone she lived.

Parson, coming up the wooded path from the west, stopped when he saw Judith and stood for some minutes watching her. What thoughts had brought that look of peace to Judith's eyes? he wondered—indeed, marvelled, for none knew better than he what John's loss had meant to

Judith. And he had spent himself in those fearful days, to bring her back to life and sanity; winning a losing battle at last when, almost terror-stricken at the responsibility he must assume, he placed John's son in her arms and said: "He needs ye, Judith." And often, then and since, it had come to him to wonder how barren life might be without "love"—but yet how simple! And today, try as he would, he could not repress the resurgence of his love for that obstinate man.

He opened the gate and went in. Judith greeted him with a smile and gestured toward the hammock. He nodded understanding. " 'Tis a day from heaven," he said quietly.

"The air's like wine," she answered.

"Spring — resurrection — God's promise fulfilled," he murmured, looking seaward where a boat was putting off from the lighthouse tender.

"Days like this it seems as if no storms could be," Judith said, following his gaze. And after a pause: "Life's like that."

He nodded assent. "Would it had been God's will that John might be still wi' us! He loved such days as this."

Judith shook her head slowly. "John died a great death, Parson."

He gave her a quick look, but her eyes were on a bronze tablet set in the wall of the cottage.

Parson read the inscription aloud, though they both knew it by heart.

"To the everlasting memory of John Strong whose death like his life was an example all men may follow. He lived his life for others. He died that another might live. 'Greater love hath no man than this.'"

And he wondered again how much Judith comprehended of the irony of those words.

"What think ye John would have made of hisself if his life had been spared?" Judith asked him.

He was startled. "Ye think he mightn't have growed wi' th' years, then?"

Judith didn't answer, but after awhile she said: "I like to think of him as I saw him last. His great strength shinin' like a light in the dark . . . afraid of nothin' . . . . An' if he'd lived, Parson, where would his pride have taken him?"

"I would he had!" Parson said, fervently. "Time would have taught him to bow to God's power."

Judith shook her head again. "Before John would have learned to bow his head, worse sufferin' than death would have come to him. No, Parson, I'm thinkin' God were kind to John, after all."

Parson looked at her in amazement. He could

almost hear again that dreadful cry, a thousand times repeated, in those days of her delirium and remorse: " 'Twas me sent him to his death wi' a lie!" He saw now her deep eyes fill and the great tears fall slowly.

"There's not many, Judith, would have th' courage an' th' great love to speak like that," he said gently.

"I don't know," she answered. "But I know there were only sorrow ahead for John, an' he was no man to bear pain—not the kind was in store for him, if he'd lived."

They stood silent for a long time, their eyes on the silver sea. Finally Parson sighed. "Th' ways of God are strange ways, my daughter, an' hard of understandin'," he said. "I'll step in an' fetch Elspeth out. This air should do her a world of good."

"Ay, an' His lessons be hard to learn," Judith murmured as the good man left her.

She watched idly a figure coming slowly along the headland path, her speculations as to his identity mingling with her dreams for the sleeping boy's future. Elspeth with Parson's hand at her elbow came from the cottage.

"Ay, 'tis a lovely day for sure, Parson," she said, as he helped her to a seat under the oaks. " 'Tis a pity they couldn't ha' waited for this

day for the weddin'. Yesterday was so wet. I thought I'd be down wi' a cold from it sure. They'll be comin' up this way soon, I'm thinkin'. It's gettin' along noon time, eh, Parson?"

"Ay," Parson nodded, and took out his watch. "'Tis after eleven o'clock."

Elspeth didn't hear his words but she felt the pressure of his hand on her shoulder and took it for answer. She was thinking of her husband—that it wouldn't be long, now, before she'd be with him, and that he would plead for her before the dread bar of Heaven's justice. But in that other world where no secrets are, where all hearts are known, would John still be angry—with her, that she loved Neil—too much? For this consummation of Neil's happiness was the reward—would have been, that is—to Elspeth for all her life's endeavor and the complete compensation for all its pain; if only John had not died. But if John had not died ——? She shuddered as this thought crossed her mind, and deliberately, with an unwonted determination, put the thought of John—all thoughts, except Neil's happiness—out of her way. This one day she would live only in this happiness, and after that, let come what would, she should be ready — but, "This one day, Lord!" she prayed silently.

"What's the time, Parson?" she asked. "Neil said by noon they'd be here. Ye don't see them comin', yet?"

Parson stooped to her ear.

"Patience, Elspeth," he said, laughing a little, and giving Judith an amused glance.

"Poor thing," Judith said, smiling sympathetically. "She's like a hen with one chick. It's wonderful she's never jealous of Lysette."

"What's she sayin', Parson?" Elspeth asked, irritably.

As Elspeth spoke, the figure whom Judith had been watching mounted slowly toward the garden, and, as Parson opened his lips to speak, stood at the gate. Parson's lips opened wider but no words came from them. He was a man frozen—turned to marble, indeed. Judith, glancing at him, looked to where he looked, and a cry burst from her heart.

"John!"

He came in slowly and they saw that his head was bandaged under his hat and that he limped slightly. His face, gray with a pallor of long illness, his eyes sunk deep in his head, and his body but skin and bones, he made a strange apparition as he stood backgrounded by the flowering hedge.

He smiled with a touch of his old brilliance,

and came toward them with outstretched hands, but they shrank away as from one risen from the grave.

" 'Tis a ghost!" Judith muttered hoarsely. And Parson, clearing his throat, stepped between John and his mother.

"Well, Parson?"

John's voice was hardly recognizable and served only to confirm Judith's wild surmise. " 'Tis a ghost," she repeated in a whisper.

He looked at her. "No," he said, "I'm no ghost, Judith, though I'm but th' wreck of a man at that."

"What's it?" Elspeth asked, peering round the parson's broad figure. "Who's th' man, Judith? What's 'e want?"

" 'Tis your John, mother. Don't ye know me?" he said huskily.

Elspeth put a hand to her ear. "Eh, what's it?"

Parson motioned John for silence and turned to Elspeth, but his tongue refused its office. After a moment he covered his face with one hand and groped for the chair back with the other.

John went to Elspeth and took her hand.

"Mother!"

She peered up at him, then withdrew her hand and sought her spectacles.

"My eyes bain't so good of late," she said apologetically.

Judith, at last convinced that John was no ghost, but himself in the flesh, went to the old woman, and spoke into her ear. " 'Tis John's self, Elspeth. He's come back to us."

Elspeth drew away from John. "Oh, no, no, no, not today!" she gasped, clinging to Judith and trembling violently. "Not today, Judith!"

John straightened up; a look of bewildered pain crossed his eyes.

"Mother!" he said in a tone of surprise, "bain't ye glad to see me?"

Judith realized at once that Elspeth had not understood her words, but thought some friend of John's had come to talk of him, and Elspeth could never talk of John without getting in a "state." Judith hesitated now, fearful of the effect of such sudden reversal of the old woman's settled belief in John's death; fearful of the effect upon John, too, if his mother showed her real feeling. Elspeth was still muttering: "Oh, not today, Judith—I'm a wicked woman, God help me — not today — not today——" And before Judith could decide what to do she heard Parson's voice under forced control saying:

"In God's name, John, why haven't ye wrote? Why didn't ye let us know ye lived?"

"In God's name?" John smiled bitterly. "I didn't know it myself, Parson," he said, patting his mother's shoulder gently, "not till only a short while ago. I was picked up outside there by the cutter *Service* an' taken to the Marine Hospital at North Ledge with a smashed leg, an' a broken head. I was like a madman, they told me, when I wasn't like one dead, an' that for half a year or so. An' when I did get up an' about again I had no memory of my name or home or no one."

"Great God!" Parson murmured. And Judith caught a sob in her throat which she made no attempt to hide.

John went on in the husky voice of a sick man. "I took service with the Coast Guard, soon as I was strong enough to go outside, an' last winter I fell sick with terrible headaches, an' the like, till I was near crazy. I could do no work—all I could do was think! I'd catch a thought, half thought—I don't know how to tell ye—just enough to drive me wild with the knowin' I was somebody an' not enough to know who I was or where I was come from. They sent me back to hospital and put me to sleep somehow. Then the doctors opened up my skull an' took out the broken bone that was pressin' on my brain, an' I came back to bein' John Strong once more."

"But *then*, John? Ye should have wrote!"

"I did, Parson. When I learned the next mail boat wouldn't be sailin' till only a day before the light tender, I thought better of sendin' th' letter. A letter would be spoke of in the village, an' the whole place turn out to see me land. I'd no mind to see them all, an' listen to them questionin'. 'Twas but a day to wait an' though 'twas hard, I made myself do it, for by the light tender I could be put off at the headland and see my wife an'——" He gave a sudden start. "Where's Lysette?"

But Judith and Parson had no answer for the unexpected question, and at their silence, John cried: "She's dead!"

Judith shook her head while she gathered herself.

"No, John, she's livin'."

But the dread realization of disaster was upon him by this. He looked from one to another of the distraught faces. His mind, leaping from conjecture to conjecture, grasped the truth.

"She's wed?"

Their silence confirmed his guess, and when he spoke again his words were hardly more than a forced whisper.

"Then 'twas not a lie ye gave me that night, Judith?"

She drooped her eyes before the pain in his.

"Aye," she said. " 'Twas a lie, John, what I made ye think, though the words I said——" she paused, uncertainly. He waited for her to continue but, as she said nothing more, he turned from her, and saw the memorial tablet of bronze.

"Who put that thing there?"

"Neil."

He laughed harshly. "Neil, eh? My pious brother! He'll not think so high of me now, I'm thinkin'."

Parson gasped and spoke suddenly. He was used to making quick decisions and he made one now, sharply cognizant of the depth of his responsibility, but, as ever, ready to fight God's fight.

"John, ye can't stay here!"

John turned on him slowly. "Can't stay—here?"

"Don't ye see, man, what yer comin' back will mean?"

John stared at him in amazement. "But I've come home," he said simply.

"Ay, ye have, an' ye can't stay, John. Stop an' think, man!" Parson said steadily.

Incredulous of his hearing, John stood gazing at the man who dared to forbid him his home. For minutes his mind failed to grasp the significance of the words he'd heard; then

slowly, with a deadening sickness, he took in the other's meaning. A feeling of nausea came over him. He sat down on the steps of the cottage and, putting his elbows on his knees, held his aching head. He heard Parson's voice in husky monotone, but understood nothing of what he was saying, till with a shock he caught the words—"God has dealt harshly wi' ye, my son——" He got to his feet, silencing Parson with a gesture of command.

He looked at his mother rocking herself to and fro in her chair and moaning unintelligibly —to Judith, wide-eyed with grief—to Parson's set face, and cried brokenly:

"Is this the way ye greet a man gone from ye for nigh three years? Am I forever to be baited by this God of yours because I will not bend my knees in foolish fear of a legend fit only for children's ears? Here's a man come home—*Home!* Do ye know what that means to a man—after more than two years of exile—every wakin' minute of that time a longin' for them he loves—not knowin' what was troublin' his mind? Have ye no hearts at all, you two? Or are they but stone and steel, that ye can stand there an' try an' rob me of all I lost an' am now won safe back to?"

Parson held out both hands to stop the flow of John's words. The tears streamed down his

cheeks and he shook with sobs. But John would not be stopped; he felt the very ground of his existence slipping from under him, and the need, the terrible need, to hold on.

"Has this God, then," he went on, "this God ye blat an' bray about from morn to night, has He squeezed yer hearts so dry of all feelin' an' humanity that ye can greet a man like this, that comes back to ye from the very dead?"

"John!" Parson cried, "John, God gave ye everything a man could wish—everything! An' ye laughed an' said 'There is no God.' I warned ye but ye took no heed. Then He spilled the vials of His wrath upon ye an' ye defied Him an' He struck ye down!"

"Aye, an' after all I've been through for it, ye give my wife to another an' bar me from my home, the home where I was borned! My own mother, my own mother! An' the woman that's loved me from my youth! An' you—you that brought me into the world, an' has known my childhood an' all the trials of my life—Parson! Parson!"

He stood swaying from side to side, his face distorted by the realization of his loss.

" 'Tis not us that bars ye, man," Parson said, when he could speak, "but Him that ye defied. Think, John!"

John steadied himself at this. "Ha, so," he

said through set teeth, "well, if that's the sort of God ye worship, then I defy Him again. Now let Him strike, for I move not one step from here!"

Parson spoke calmly now. "Ye needn't to blaspheme again to call God's wrath upon ye, John. When He struck ye down that storm-wrung night, He struck ye for yer soul's good. He's not done wi' ye yet, neither, for ye still defy Him, still do ye harden yer heart against Him. Verily yer sin is great, else would He ha' gi'n ye th' mercy of death."

"I'll have none of His mercy," John said angrily, "I ask only for justice. Ye raise a monument to a dead man an' praise his virtues, an' when ye find him still alive ye treat him like he was yer enemy, an' would drive him forth to death again!"

" 'Twas a fine deed ye did, John, th' is no denyin' it—not even you. But ye've a finer one ahead of ye. Think, John, what ye would do!"

"I'm not for fine deeds, Parson, if ye call it a fine deed to give up my life that others may live in sin. Ye're a fine preacher, yerself, to be talkin' of my sins. When was these two wed?"

"Yesterday at noon."

John looked at Parson, at first incredulous,

but his incredulity was rather a positive belief that such things as this were beyond possibility, than any doubt of Parson's word.

"Yesterday?"

Parson raised his hands toward John as though opening before him a vision of Truth.

"If I had been but one day sooner——"

"Ay, but one day."

"My letter——"

"Th' mail boat put in at dawn yesterday," Parson said inexorably. "If ye'd sent it th' letter would have reached us in time—ye were prevented, John!"

From his vantage point near the gate Parson saw Neil and Lysette coming up the path from the village. They were laughing, though he could hear no sound. Again his habit of quick decisions stood him in stead.

"Judith," he said deliberately, "go an' keep them back till I give ye th' word. There's but one way—God will decide it."

Judith looked for John's remonstrance. She was frightened for both the brothers. But John hadn't heard. He was fighting a new enemy. He was in a trap! Was it, then, of his own devising, after all?

That moment in the hospital at North Ledge when after more than two years of frantic bewilderment he had come out of the ether to

know himself for himself, and memories had rushed upon him like an army of rescuing angels, that moment had immersed him in the absolute knowledge of his wife's integrity, his brother's incapability of treason. And in the ensuing hours a deeper understanding of life than he had ever imagined had come to him—understanding of passion's inescapable, ruthless clutch. And a little of Judith's ordeal at last penetrated to his heart.

He knew now that Neil's love for Lysette was inevitable, that indeed he had himself prepared the way. Had not his own love for her delicate seashell beauty come to him direct from his poet brother's dreams? He would go home and show Neil—nay, them all, his mother, his wife, Judith—what the love of a strong man could be to them. And in that hour of revelation, as he lay helpless and lonely, he came nearer to an understanding of his father's God. He smiled in tender pity for the old Parson who could preach and worship a God of wrath. Yes, verily, a strong man might indeed worship a God of truth, of all knowledge, wisdom, understanding—Love. And it came to him again and again that every act of his life since boyhood had been set upon the pedestal of his belief in Self; his power to control destiny to his uses. How childish he had been! how weak, indeed!

All this came back to him now as he looked his position in the eyes and deliberately balanced its incalculable potentialities.

Parson's insistent voice broke in on his reflections.

"John—John——"

"Eh?"

"Will ye do one thing I ask of ye? an' I'm done."

"What is it, Parson?"

"Stand there beyond th' lattice, an' listen while I ask Neil an' Lysette a question or two?"

"Neil? An'——"

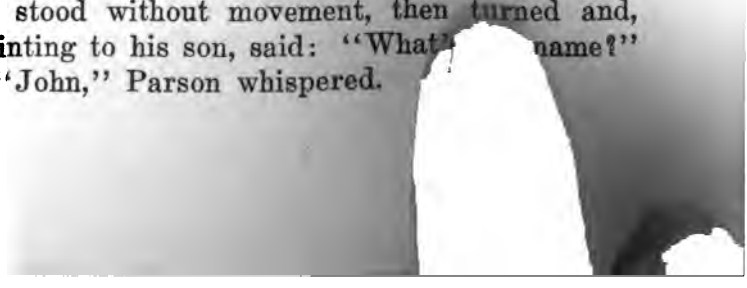
"They're comin', there," Parson pointed. "Do this thing, my son, do this one thing!"

"An' what be the good of such a thing?"

"This, John. On their answers ye shall judge for yerself. If ye will not take God's judgment, then in the name of yer own self—that ye've made yer God—ye shall judge. I'm done, John, I'm done."

Indirection was not to his liking, but after a moment's consideration, with a weary shrug John gave in and turned to go round the vine-covered lattice, but stopped short as he saw the sleeping child in the hammock. For a long time he stood without movement, then turned and, pointing to his son, said: "What' name?"

"John," Parson whispered.



"John!"

The father went close to the hammock. Twice he turned toward Parson and seemed about to speak, but gradually his will ebbed. He discovered himself indifferent to the universe. Incapable of reaction. He raised his head and went on round the lattice and out of view.

Parson beckoned Judith, and she followed the frightened bride and groom to the garden. They saw Elspeth's incessant rocking to and fro, and Parson's tear-stained cheeks. Lysette flew to the hammock and knelt watching anxiously the sleeping child, convinced that he was ill and in danger.

"Well, my children, ye're happy this first bright day of yer new life?" Parson asked with an assumption of cheerfulness.

"Ay, sir, but——"

"One minute, Neil, there's nothin' wrong wi' no one here. Th' child is well, as ye see. But I'm going to ask ye a question or two, an' Lysette. An' I charge ye answer me as ye would answer at the Judgment Seat, for I have a purpose in my questions, son."

Lysette turned and went quickly to Neil and took his arm.

"Why, Parson——" Neil looked at his mother, at Judith and back again to Parson. "Well, sir?" he said obediently.

"Ye've loved one another long, you two?"

"Ay," Neil answered, feeling the pressure of Lysette's fingers on his arm.

"When the year of mourning' was up," Parson went on evenly, "more'n a year an' a half ago, why were ye not married then?"

"Well," Neil said, hesitating a little, "well, poor John were drowned, Parson, but his body never came ashore. We thought till the law called him dead, we liked better to wait—out of respect to his memory, too."

"Was they no other reasons?" He looked at Lysette.

She looked down at the grass and poked at a twig with the toe of her shoe. "I was afraid—I don't know why—I——" She stopped speaking and looked up at Neil as though for help.

Parson smiled reassuringly. "If John could be brought back—by a miracle—would you, if th' power lay in your hands, be the one to bring him back, Neil?"

"Of course!" Neil said, looking his surprise at the question.

"An' gi' Lysette up to him?" Parson held out his hand to prevent Lysette from speaking.

"Why—why, yes," Neil said slowly.

"Neil!" Lysette cried, facing him.

" 'Tis easy to say, lad."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Tell me the truth as ye hope for eternal life, son."

"Yes—I would," Neil said steadily, "because it's all John's. All I have is his, all I am. It's his example I live by, and the very life that's in my body today was his gift—and at the price of his own."

"An' you, Lysette?"

"No, no, no!" she cried. "Don't ask me!"

"I do ask ye," Parson said with authority.

"No, no, I couldn't—I couldn't! If I'm wicked I can't help it—— No, no, no, never!" She buried her face against Neil's arm and wept convulsively.

"What's it you're doin', Parson?" Neil cried, "with your questions like that! It's not in nature to wish for sufferin'. Everything I have is John's and I'd give it all back if I could. But that's not sayin' I want to give it all up. To do that I'd have to give up my life. Now what's it all about?" He turned to Lysette. "Hush, my precious. You're not wicked at all."

Parson touched his sleeve. "Neil, ye've known me from yer birth. Have I ever treated you or anyone wi' aught but consideration an' square honesty?"

"No, no, Parson, but it's hard to understand a thing like this!"

"Trust yer old Parson, Neil, trust completely."

Judith, who had stood rigid with apprehension watching the lattice door, turned her eyes seaward and with a cry clutched the old man's arm.

"Parson!"

Without another word she opened the gate and flew down the headland path toward a figure in the distance; a figure of a stooping man who seemed to walk with great difficulty.

They watched her; Neil with wonder and curiosity, Parson with a mingling of relief and sorrow and fear. They saw Judith run straight on till she overtook the man, and then, as he turned at her approach, clasp him about the body and fight to hold him back. But he broke from her and she followed, pleading with wild gestures, until he hailed the lighthouse tender, which was making a long curve in toward the headland. Then they saw a boat lowered, saw it put into shore, till hidden by the rocks at the point, and when it appeared again to their fascinated gaze, plainly they saw Judith beside the figure in the stern sheets.

Dumbfounded, Neil turned to Parson for explanation, but the old man shook his head—tried to smile. He seemed to himself like another being than the determined man of a few

minutes ago. He was indeed "done." He leaned now upon his God with a childlike confidence which left him completely free from responsibility. The affair was out of his hands at last, and he raised them in token of his renunciation of control, turned and made his way down the path toward his home.

"Parson!" Neil cried, and started to follow. Lysette dropped his arm and went swiftly to the hammock as the boy whimpered restlessly. At the gate Neil stopped. He stood watching the boat make the tender's side, saw it hoisted to the davits and then the steamer gathering way toward the south. What was all this mystery? These disturbing questions at such a time? Parson had said there was a purpose in them—— And Judith—acting almost like a mad thing—had gone away with a stranger. He turned toward Lysette. She was crooning a slumber song while she swung the hammock gently. His mother was asleep, her head resting against the tree trunk; and a sudden reaction, a compelling sense of peace, stole over him. He watched Lysette, till, feeling his eyes upon her, she looked at him and smiled, putting her finger to her lips to caution silence.

"Ah, it's good to be alive!" he whispered to himself, drawing a deep breath of the ambient, perfumed air. "Thanks to John," he added, as his eyes lighted on the tablet.